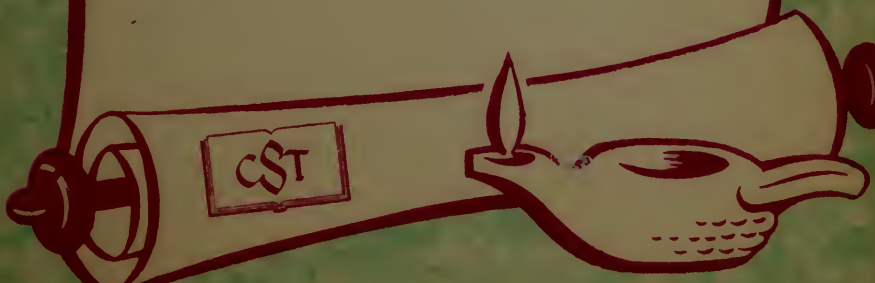
RALPH EARLE

# Meet the MAJOR PROPHETS



# MEET THE MAJOR PROPHETS

*by*
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BEACON HILL PRESS
Kansas City, Mo.

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Beacon Hill Press

First Printing, 1958

Printed in the United States of America

To
the thousands of students
who have sat in my classes
the past twenty-five years
at
Eastern Nazarene College
and
Nazarene Theological Seminary

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## PREFACE

This is a companion volume to *Meet the Minor Prophets.* The generous response accorded the earlier work has encouraged the author to believe that there is an increasing desire for the study of the Bible when it is presented, not as a tome of death, but as a book of life.

The chapters on Isaiah are longer than the ones on the other three. Most Bible students would doubtless approve the larger emphasis given to "the prince of prophets." Isaiah's message is more comprehensive and also more contemporaneous in significance.

No one can read carefully the messages of these four Major Prophets without sensing their striking pertinence for the modern scene. Though written in Old Testament times they speak to our day. Man now, as always, needs to hear sounding in his soul a "Thus saith the Lord."

RALPH EARLE

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CHAPTER ONE

## THE PRINCE OF PROPHETS

Isaiah 1—39

*Name:* means "Jehovah saves"
*Home:* Jerusalem
*Date of ministry:* about 740-700 B.C.
*Place of ministry:* southern Kingdom of Judah
*Outline of book:*

I. Prophecies Concerning Judah and Jerusalem (cc. 1—12)
II. Oracles Against Foreign Nations (cc. 13—23)
III. Messages of Salvation (cc. 24—27)
IV. Warnings Against Alliance with Egypt (cc. 28—35)
V. History of Hezekiah's Time (cc. 36—39)
VI. The Message of Comfort (cc. 40—66)

*Verses to memorize:* 9:6; 26:3; 32:17; 41:10, 13; 53:5; 55:6-7

### I. PROPHECIES CONCERNING JUDAH AND JERUSALEM (cc. 1—12)

#### A. THE HEADING (1:1)

In common with several other prophetic books of the Old Testament, the first verse of Isaiah forms a heading for the book. The prophecy proper thus begins at verse two.

The heading furnishes the chronological setting. Isaiah prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz,

and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." The first verse of Hosea names the same four kings of Judah but adds Jeroboam II of Israel, since Hosea prophesied in the northern kingdom. Isaiah's ministry was in the southern Kingdom of Judah; so only the kings of that country are mentioned. The dates would be about 740-700 B.C.

Isaiah seems to have been a citizen of Jerusalem and a counselor of its kings. He was a statesman as well as prophet.

### B. The Preface (1:2-31)

The first chapter of Isaiah probably should be considered a preface to the book, written after the rest of the book, as prefaces usually are. This is substantiated by the general, comprehensive character of this chapter and also by the fact that the first verse of chapter two reads: "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." This seems to indicate a beginning for the main body of the book.

The tone of this preface is that of stern judgment. In verse four the prophet labels his country a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity." In this verse there occurs also the outstanding key phrase of Isaiah, "the Holy One of Israel," which is found twenty-five times in the book. There is doubtless a connection with this unique phrase and the prophet's vision of the holiness of God. For him Jehovah was pre-eminently "the Holy One of Israel."

The rotten moral condition of the nation is described in verse six as like that of a sick person covered from head to foot with putrefying sores. This is due to the people's revolt against God.

In verse nine mention is made of an important emphasis in Isaiah—the "remnant." No matter how bad the nation became there would always be a few faithful ones.

In verses 10-15 Isaiah blows the bugle on the same note as his contemporary Amos—that righteousness is more important than ritual. God says that He is sick and tired of seeing the people bring their sacrifices and tread His courts. Ritualism when not backed up by righteousness is revolting to the Holy One.

And so God says to Judah: "Wash you, make you clean; . . . cease to do evil; learn to do well" (vv. 16-17). And then comes that great invitation of Deity to humanity: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (v. 18).

### C. The Three Jerusalems (cc. 2—4)

1. *Jerusalem the Golden* (2:2-5). Isaiah tells us what he "*saw* concerning . . . Jerusalem" (2:1). The first sight is a glimpse of future glory. "In the last days" Jerusalem would be the capital of the nations, and all peoples would flock thither to worship. The word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem, and war would be superseded by peace. All this received a measure of fulfillment in the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Pentecost at Jerusalem and the preaching of the gospel beginning there. But for its complete fulfillment it must await the second coming of Christ.

2. *Jerusalem the Grimy* (2:6—4:1). The bulk of these three chapters is taken up with the description of Jerusalem's sin and consequent judgment. Outwardly things were very prosperous. The land was "full of silver and gold" and "full of horses" (v. 7). But it was also "full of idols" (v. 8). Prosperity and idolatry too often go together, even in America today.

In chapter two, verse twelve, we meet a second key phrase of Isaiah and other prophets—"the day of the

Lord." It will be a day of judgment on the people for their pride.

Always there is the eternal contrast between the righteous and the wicked. "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (3:10-11).

The prophet's description of the women of Judah in his day (3:16-23) sounds distressingly modern. Humility and sincerity are still the cardinal virtues of the kingdom of Heaven.

3. *Jerusalem the Godly* (4:2-6). A redeemed remnant, washed from its sin, will be called holy. In the midst of this glorious Jerusalem, God himself will dwell.

### D. The Lord's Vineyard (c. 5)

1. *God's Vineyard* (vv. 1-7). This beautiful parable portrays Jehovah's loving care in protecting, preparing, and planting His vineyard. He "fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine" (v. 2). He also built a watchtower to keep away the thieves, and made a wine press for pressing out the grapes. But when He looked for fruit, it brought forth only wild grapes.

The vineyard is identified as "the house of Israel" and the vine planted there as "the men of Judah" (v. 7). For its failure to produce good fruit the vineyard is to be destroyed (vv. 5-6).

2. *Wild Grapes* (vv. 8-23). Six kinds of wild grapes are enumerated here, each introduced by the word "woe." The first is *insatiable greed* (vv. 8-10). "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst

of the earth!" What a pathetic picture of those who spend their lives acquiring real estate and amassing a fortune, only to leave it all at death! There is no more senseless tragedy than this.

The second kind of wild grapes is identified as *drunkenness* (vv. 11-17). With all our boasted learning and achievement we are fast becoming a nation of dissipated drinkers, as Judah was in Isaiah's day.

The third woe is pronounced against *defiance* of God (vv. 18-19). The people draw sin as with a cart rope and then challenge the Holy One of Israel to hasten His work. But that work of judgment will come sooner than they wish.

The fourth wild grape is *moral confusion* (v. 20): "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil!" That is still done today.

The fifth evil is *pride* (v. 21). The people were "wise in their own eyes."

The sixth woe repeats the charge of drunkenness (vv. 22-23), with its resultant injustice in business.

3. *The Consequences* (vv. 24-30). All this condition of sinfulness will result in judgment, which will be as fire devouring stubble and flame consuming chaff. This is because they have "cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (v. 24). "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (v. 25).

### E. Isaiah's Vision (c. 6)

It was in the year that King Uzziah died. That great and good and godly king had raised the nation of Judah to its highest heights of prosperity since the days of David and Solomon. During the fifty-two years of his illustrious reign he conquered the Philistines on the coast of the western sea and the Arabians on the edge of the eastern

desert. The Ammonites across the Jordan submitted with gifts, and Uzziah's name became famous from Egypt to the Euphrates.

Meanwhile he strengthened his capital city, Jerusalem. On its massive walls he built observation towers at the corners and over the gates. Some of his "cunning men" invented "engines" which could hurl great stones from the walls on any who attempted to storm the city. These were the forerunners of nineteenth century cannon. Arrows were shot by other engines, ancestors of the modern machine gun. Little Judah was in the heyday of power and prosperity.[1]

The young patriot-prophet Isaiah was very proud of his people. He wanted to be in the forefront of the parade as the kingdom marched into the golden age. (The future was rosy with promise.)

But suddenly all was shattered. In a moment of pride and self-will the king decided to offer incense on the golden altar in the holy place. This was the prerogative of the priesthood. So into the Temple flocked fourscore priests of the Lord to prevent their monarch's mad deed.

Uzziah blazed forth in fury against them. Who dared defy the king? He forgot for the moment that he was defying the King of Kings.

Suddenly he saw the priests shrink back in horror from him. The dread mark of leprosy was clearly visible on his forehead. Uzziah was God's doomed man. Terrified, he fled from the holy place to live a lonely life in a leprosarium the rest of his days. (*His conquests were ended because he had failed to conquer self.*) He had forgotten that submission to God's will is the greatest victory a man can win.

The poor prophet's heart was broken. But perhaps he prayed: "O Lord, Thou didst cleanse Miriam of her leprosy when she murmured against Moses in the wilderness. Would it not please Thee to heal the king and

restore him to the throne?" All hope was ended when one day the dreaded message came: "The king is dying."

1. *His Holy God.* In that sad hour Isaiah did the only thing left to mortal man. Into the Temple he went and prostrated himself before the Lord. As he prayed he lifted tear-filled eyes, and, lo, a vision! It seemed he could see the throne of Judah, now empty, sinking out of sight and his heart sank with it. But suddenly, rising above the horizon, he saw another throne. And this was not empty. On it sat the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (The young prophet learned that day that though earthly kingdoms may totter and thrones may tumble, yet the eternal kingdom of God is secure.) At the center of the universe sits the Almighty King, supreme, serene, calm in the confidence of His infinite power to right all wrongs and restore all wreckage made by man.

But not only did Isaiah see "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." Surrounding the thrones were seraphs. These holy creatures, made to dwell in the very presence of Deity, yet draped their faces and their feet with awe and reverence before the Holy One of Israel.

(The greatest need in the world today is a renewed sense of the sacredness of life.) Sin is made a joke. Holiness receives snickering contempt. Man needs to be confronted with God.

The prophet not only *saw;* he *heard.* Across the infinite spaces echoed the cry of the seraphs: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." But how few people have eyes to see, ears to hear, or hearts to feel the glory of God—shining forth in a flaming sunset, opening up in the beauty and fragrance of a blooming rose, sounding out in the singing of the birds, throbbing in the pulsations of new life in the springtime! How much man misses as he rushes madly on!

Isaiah not only saw and heard; he *felt.* The very doorposts of the Temple began to tremble as if the Al-

mighty were shaking them. The threshold shook beneath his feet.

2. *His Sinful Self.* What was the effect of all this? Earthquake tremors in the prophet's soul! To the very depth of his being he was moved by the holiness of God. All of his self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction was shattered and shaken to pieces.

The news of the king's death had caused the air castles that Isaiah had built to the heavens to come crashing down upon his head until they lay in ruins around his feet. But now something far more significant had taken place. His inner self-complacency had been crushed by the mighty impact of the divine.

We never really see ourselves until we see God. The vision of God's holiness gave the prophet a revelation of his own sinfulness. He cried out in despair: "Woe is me! for I am undone." The Hebrew says: "I am cut off." He saw a gap between his soul and God he could not close, a canyon looming large he could not cross, a chasm deep and wide he could not bridge. Sin always separates.

3. *The Divine Remedy.* Isaiah not only saw the holiness of the Lord and the sinfulness of himself; he also saw the remedy. Suddenly a seraph winged his way to the prophet's side. With a live coal taken with the tongs from off the altar he symbolically touched the lips of the prophet and said: "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." (The cleansing had come in answer to the cry for help.)

Every true vision is a transforming experience. We can never see God and be the same. We may look at ourselves and feel satisfied. Apparently most people are, for they do little to improve. We may look at others and be complacent about the comparison. But we can never look at God and feel comfortable. His utter holiness drives us to our knees with a cry for His grace.

No man can look at Christ and feel complacent. *His* perfection will always challenge our imperfections. The vision of Him in all His beauty will always create in our hearts a divine discontent.

Some have interpreted this vision of Isaiah—recorded in the sixth chapter—as his initial call to the prophetic ministry though written later than the first five chapters.[2] But it may be that at this point the prophet received a deeper experience with God which greatly enlarged and enriched his ministry.

### F. Political Entanglements (cc. 7—12)

1. *Ahaz and Assyria* (c. 7). In 734 B.C. the northern Kingdom of Israel and its neighbor to the north, Syria, were threatened by the rising power of Assyria, which was seeking to conquer all western Asia. Feeling the need of a strong alliance against Assyria, Pekah, the king of Israel, and Rezin, the king of Syria, evidently asked Ahaz, the king of Judah, to join them. When he refused—preferring alliance with Assyria—Pekah and Rezin decided to attack him (v. 1; cf. II Kings 16:5).

Right at this juncture the prophet Isaiah stepped into the situation. He knew that Ahaz was contemplating sending to Assyria for help. Taking his son who bore the symbolical name Shear-jashub, "a remnant shall return" (v. 3), he went out to meet the young king. His message to him was: "Take heed, and be quiet" (v. 4). Translated into the terms of the situation it meant, "Don't make any foreign alliance!" The prophet told him not to be afraid of "the two tails of these smoking firebrands," the kings of Israel and Syria. Their fierce anger would soon burn out and they would be consumed by Assyria. All Ahaz had to do was to trust God and let Him work the thing out.

It should be noted that Syria is also referred to by its capital, Damascus, as Israel is by its capital, Samaria.

The northern kingdom is also sometimes called Ephraim after its leading tribe, in whose territory Samaria was located.

The kings of Israel and Syria were threatening to invade Judah, depose Ahaz, and put on the throne Tabeel, who would co-operate with them (v. 6). But the Lord assured Ahaz that this would not take place (v. 7). Then He challenged him with this warning: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." (It is still true that faith in God is the only sure basis of security, whether individual or national.)

Ahaz was then commanded to ask for a sign that God would do this (v. 11). But the king had already made up his mind to disobey God and go ahead with the Assyrian alliance. So he stubbornly refused to ask for a sign (v. 12), lest he be "put on the spot" by the sign's fulfillment. So God gave him a sign: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (v. 14). It should be obvious that Isaiah 7:14 could be a sign to Ahaz only if it were fulfilled in his day.[3] Before the son had grown to the age of accountability Syria and Israel would both lose their kings whom Ahaz feared. This soon happened when Assyria captured Damascus in 732 B.C. and Samaria in 722 B.C.

The prophecy then also looks across seven centuries to the virgin birth of Jesus. It is characteristic of Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament to have a nearer, partial fulfillment in the period of the prophet and then a distant, complete fulfillment in the coming of Christ. This fulfillment is recorded in the words of Matthew: "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:22-23).

Since Ahaz refused to obey, God warned him that the Assyrians would come and "shame" (v. 20) Judah. This was the price of disobedience.

2. *The Folly of Foreign Alliance* (8:1—9:7). The prophet was commanded to take a scroll—probably of papyrus—and with a pen write concerning his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz—"hasting to the spoil, hurrying to the prey." This symbolical name was to signify the speedy invasion of Syria and Israel by Assyria. Before the child learned to talk this would happen (v. 4).

The people were refusing "the waters of Shiloah that go softly" (v. 6)—perhaps a reference to the quiet water of the Pool of Siloam (John 9:7)—and instead wanted to make an alliance with Assyria. So God warned that Assyria would come in as a mighty, flooding river, overflowing the land (v. 7). The irony of it was that when Assyria, on invitation from Ahaz, conquered Syria and Israel she continued on to the invasion and punishment of Judah. Ahaz got more than he asked for.

Isaiah was statesman as well as prophet and he knew that foreign alliances result in war. The only safety of the nation lay in quiet trust in God. The people were saying with nervous fear, "A confederacy" (v. 12). But the prophet's advice was: "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (v. 13). If they feared God instead of foreign nations, they would remain secure.

The prophet was very conscious that he and his sons had been given symbolical names in order that they might be "for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts" (v. 18). Isaiah was the key man in Judah at the time, but the king refused to recognize him.

This section closes with another great Messianic prophecy. There is no more beautiful description of

Christ in the Old Testament than that found in Isaiah 9:6 —"For unto us a child is born"—the Babe of Bethlehem— "unto us a son is given"—the sinless Son of God, given as a Sacrifice for our sins—"and the government shall be upon his shoulder"—the administration of our lives placed upon the big, broad shoulders of His infinite, eternal strength—"and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." What else could have inspired Handel's majestic oratorio *The Messiah!*

3. *Accumulated Wrath* (9:8—10:4). Here we have a powerful poem in four stanzas, each ending with the tragic refrain: "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). In the first stanza (9:8-12) the people are scored for their arrogant pride, and the prediction is made that Israel will be devoured by the Syrians on the north and the Philistines on the south. The second stanza (9:13-17) describes the unrepentant attitude of the people and warns of destruction in battle. The third (9:18-21) predicts confusion and anarchy: "Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: and they together shall be against Judah." With war clouds drifting in over them from foreign nations, the tribes will yet fight with one another. The fourth stanza (10:1-4) describes the heartless cruelty of the rich in oppressing the poor, accumulating property unjustly, when everything will soon be lost in the Captivity. What fools we mortals be! And yet many are doing that today in the face of eternal torment.

4. *God's Instrument for Punishment* (10:5-34). The key to this section is found in its first verse: "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation." Assyria is God's instrument to punish a "hypocritical nation." What a terrible thing that Judah should be called "the people of my wrath" (v. 6)!

But Assyria is unconscious that it is being used by God (v. 7). It has destroyed (v. 10) greater nations than Judah (Jerusalem) and Israel (Samaria). When the Lord has used Assyria to chastise His people, He will in turn punish Assyria for its pride and arrogant cruelty (vv. 12-15).

The eleventh verse indicates clearly that this particular prophecy was uttered after the fall of Samaria in 722 or 721 B.C. Assyria was saying: "Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" The capture of Samaria, marking the downfall of the northern Kingdom of Israel, came at almost exactly the center of Isaiah's ministry (740-700 B.C.).

The doctrine of the "remnant" is heavily underscored in verses 20, 21, and 22. (One of the important contributions of Isaiah is that a remnant will return after the destruction of the nation.)

5. *The Return from Captivity* (cc. 11—12). This section begins with another beautiful Messianic prophecy: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." The Messiah is to be "of the stem of Jesse"; that is, "the son of David." On the basis of this passage and others the scribes of Jesus' day taught this (cf. Mark 13:35).

The two main characteristics of the Messiah's reign will be *righteousness* (11:4-5) and *peace* (11:6-9). The gentiles will be included in the new Kingdom (11:10). As far as Israel is concerned, it will be a *remnant* that will return from Egypt and the East (11:11-12). The age-long strife between Ephraim and Judah—which had brought about the division into two kingdoms under Jeroboam and Rehoboam (I Kings 12)—will at last be healed

(11:13), and surrounding nations will submit to their rule (11:14). Just how and when 11:15-16 will be fulfilled is not revealed.

Chapter 12 is a beautiful hymn of thanksgiving that will be sung by the redeemed remnant on its return from captivity. It reminds one of Moses' song after the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15).

## II. ORACLES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS (cc. 13—23)

### A. Babylon (13:1—14:23)

The prominent prophetic phrase, "the day of the Lord," occurs here again (13:6-13). It is a day of "destruction from the Almighty" (v. 6), "to lay the land desolate" (v. 9). This is in keeping with all the descriptions of the day of the Lord.

The conquerors of Babylon are identified as the Medes (13:17). They took the city in 538 B.C. and the Medo-Persian Empire succeeded the Babylonian.

The description of Babylon's desolation (11:19-22) has been literally fulfilled. For over two thousand years it has lain in total ruins, as have Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 19) for many centuries more.

Frequently throughout Isaiah there are brief predictions of the restoration of Israel. One of these occurs here (14:1-3).

Then comes a "proverb"—better, "taunt-song"—against the king of Babylon (14:4-23). Included in this is one of the most striking passages in the book (vv. 12-15), the language of which seems to reach beyond the king of Babylon to the great oppressor of mankind, Satan. It is traditionally held that Satan was originally a beautiful angel called Lucifer, or "day star." It was pride and self-will that caused his fall. Five times in two

verses (12-13) the significant phrase "I will" occurs. This is the real nature of sin. It is rebellion against God. It would appear that sin began in self-will, and it certainly finds its main expression in that attitude. Sin causes man himself to want to usurp the place of authority in his life that God alone should hold.

### B. Assyria (14:24-27)

This nation had been the main threat to the peace of western Asia. Now God declares its overthrow, which took place with the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.

### C. Philistia (14:28-32)

This oracle concerns "Palestina" (v. 29). It is generally recognized that the modern name Palestine is derived from the Philistines, who occupied the southern part of the coastal plain of Judah. Ultimately they gave their name to the whole country.

This brief "burden" is dated "in the year that king Ahaz died" (v. 28). That would be about 727 B.C., the year that Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria, died. The Philistines were rejoicing because the rod that smote them was broken. But the prophet warns them that "out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice [adder], and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent" (v. 29). Tiglath-pileser III ("the serpent") would be followed successively by Shalmanezer IV ("adder") and Sargon II ("fiery flying serpent"), each one more cruel than his predecessor. The court chronicles of these kings, discovered and deciphered in recent times, have abundantly confirmed this prediction.

Verse 32 suggests that messengers had come from the Philistine cities, when the "smoke" of Assyria's coming appeared "from the north" (v. 31), seeking an alliance with Judah for mutual protection against the invading army. But the answer of Jerusalem was: "The

Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it." Unfortunately for Judah this wise policy was not followed at a later time.

### D. Moab (cc. 15—16)

In 734 B.C. the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser, had invaded Galilee and Transjordan, thus threatening Moab immediately to the south. The deep distress of that nation is echoed in the prophet's own feelings of compassionate sorrow over its impending doom (15:5; 16:9, 11).

The section closes with a brief oracle (16:13-14), evidently uttered later than the other, in which Isaiah definitely predicts the fall of Moab "within three years." This happened at about 711 B.C.

### E. Damascus (c. 17)

This oracle includes the northern Kingdom of Israel in its scope (cf. vv. 3-5). It is a warning that the two allies, Syria and Israel, are to be desolated. This took place, at least in a measure, in 734 B.C.

The prophecy closes, however, with a prediction that the destroyer himself will be destroyed, and that suddenly (v. 14). This was to be the fate of Assyria.

### F. Egypt and Ethiopia (cc. 18—20)

In Isaiah's earlier period both these nations were ruled by the same king. Hence the three oracles in these three chapters are treated together.

1. *Ethiopia* (c. 18). When Assyria captured Damascus (732 B.C.) and Samaria (722 B.C.), the people of Ethiopia became alarmed at the prospect of invasion by the terror from the north. So they sent ambassadors far and wide (v. 2) to ask for help. But "Isaiah bids the ambassadors to return home and quietly watch Jehovah thwart Assyria's self-confident attempt to subjugate Judah."[4]

2. *Egypt* (c. 19). This chapter divides itself rather naturally into two parts: a warning of coming destruction (vv. 1-17) and a promise of future restoration (vv. 18-25). It is prophesied that Egypt in her trouble will turn to the Lord and worship Him. The chapter closes with the amazing prediction that Egypt, Assyria, and Israel will be joined together in the worship of the Lord. Obviously some aspects of this prophecy still await their fulfillment.

3. *Egypt and Ethiopia* (c. 20). In the year that the Philistine city Ashdod was captured by the Tartan (commander in chief) of Sargon, king of Assyria, Isaiah was instructed by the Lord to walk "barefoot" and relatively "naked." (Among the Semites it was considered a disgrace to expose the human body between the neck and ankles.) For three years the prophet appeared in public clothed as a captive, a living symbol of the shame of Egypt and Ethiopia. The people of these two nations were to be led as prisoners in disgrace by the Assyrians. This took place in the conquest of Egypt in 711 B.C.

### G. The Wilderness of the Sea (21:1-10)

This oracle is generally referred to Babylon. The words, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen," are repeated in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2. It is suggested that the Elamites and Medes will be the ones to overthrow the powerful Babylonian Empire.

### H. Edom (21:11-12)

These two verses are especially valuable for their evangelistic appeal. In the gathering gloom of the closing years of the eighth century B.C. the people called to the prophet, set as a watchman on the wall: "What of the night?" Earnestness and fear are indicated by the repetition of the question. The prophet of God today should give the same answer as here: "The morning cometh, and also the night." For every person eternity will be

either a day that shall never see the dark, or the utter, "outer darkness" of a night that shall never have a dawn. For the people of Edom ("Seir") the future would be mixed with hope and fear.

### I. Arabia (21:13-17)

This brief oracle is explained by Robinson as "a sympathetic appeal to the Temanites to give bread and water to the caravans of Dedan, who have been driven by war from their usual route of travel."[5] Verse 14 should be translated as a request rather than a declaration.

### J. The Valley of Vision (c. 22)

Strictly speaking this oracle was not about a foreign nation, but rather against Judah itself. Perhaps the reason it is placed here is that it involved foreign alliances, one of Judah's besetting sins in this period.

The time was either the invasion of Judah by Sargon in 711 B.C. (Robinson) or the actual siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (G. A. Smith). In either case the city was in grave danger. While the prophet's heart was crushed with sorrow (vv. 4-5), the people were feasting instead of fasting (vv. 12-13). The Lord revealed to Isaiah that this sin would never be forgiven (v. 14). Instead of praying to God for help, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were strengthening their material defenses (vv. 8-11).

Two characters are contrasted in the second half of the chapter. Shebna, the treasurer, (vv. 15-19) had "feathered" his own nest, but would be thrown out into captivity. He was perhaps a foreigner, of Syrian extraction, who belonged to the pro-Egyptian party.[6] His position would be given to Eliakim (vv. 20-25). The latter would be fixed as a peg in a sure place (v. 23), a typical Semitic idiom. But unfortunately he would try to hang all his family on that peg (v. 24)—favoring his relatives unfairly—so that the peg would eventually

give way under the weight (v. 25). Too often good men are ruined by power and position.

### K. Tyre (c. 23)

Tyre was one of the greatest commercial cities of ancient times. Vessels sailed from its port to every part of the Mediterranean and even ventured down the west coast of Africa. But its haughty pride was to be cut down and its far-flung trade cut off. Interestingly, its period of eclipse is predicted to last seventy years (vv. 15, 17) like that of Judah. Then its former prosperity will return (vv. 17-18).

## III. MESSAGES OF SALVATION (cc. 24—27)

### A. Warning of Judgment (c. 24)

The coming captivity looms ahead in the prophet's vision: "The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled" (v. 3). Yet there will be a faithful remnant, like the gleaning of olives or grapes (v. 13). But things will be in such confusion that "the earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard" (v. 20).

### B. Joy of the Redeemed (c. 25)

This chapter is a paean of praise to God for His deliverance. It perhaps represents the thanksgiving of the people of Judah for deliverance from the Assyrian menace, or it may look forward to the return from Babylonian captivity. Especially beautiful are verses 4, 8, and 9.

### C. The Praise of Judah (c. 26)

The name Judah means "praise." It is therefore fitting that a song of praise should be sung in the land of Judah (v. 11).

One of Isaiah's many beautiful utterances is found in verse three: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

For our troubled times—as in Isaiah's day—faith is always the foundation of peace.

The chapter closes with an exhortation (vv. 20-21) to God's people to seek refuge in Him, till the storms are past.

### D. Another Vineyard Song (c. 27)

Most of the ancient prophets were fond of symbolical language. In the first verse of this chapter Isaiah mentions the swift serpent (Assyria), the crooked serpent (Babylon), and the sea dragon (Egypt). These three powers that destroyed many nations and had threatened Judah's safety would themselves be destroyed.

In this vineyard song (cf. c. 5) the prediction is made that, though temporarily damaged, "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (v. 6). But before that must come judgment and destruction, to purge Judah's sin (vv. 9-11).

## IV. WARNINGS AGAINST ALLIANCE WITH EGYPT (cc. 28—35)

### A. Six Woes (cc. 28—33)

This section contains six woes, all of which are generally supposed to relate to Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C.[7] However, the first six verses of chapter 28 describe the drunkards of Ephraim. Then the scene seems to shift to Jerusalem.

1. *Woe to Drunken Priests and Politicians* (c. 28). Things were in a bad way when Isaiah could say that "the priests and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine" (v. 7). Then he brings a charge against the scoffing politicians—"Ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem" (v. 14)—who boast that they have made a covenant with death (v. 15). He rebukes their flippant cynicism by

warning them that judgment is sure to come (v. 17). Over against their travesty he places this promise: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (v. 16). In the New Testament (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11) this rock is identified as Christ.

2. *Woe to Jerusalem* (29:1-14). Ariel means "lion of God" and is apparently used as a name for Jerusalem. Here was the appointed center for the worship of Jehovah. But this was God's appraisal of the worshipers: "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips they do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me."

3. *Woe to Those Who Hide Their Counsel from God* (29:15-24). A woe is pronounced on these who say: "Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?" They forget that God sees and knows all they do. Probably reference is to their secret plans to make an alliance with Egypt and revolt against Assyria.

4. *Woe to Those Who Turn to Egypt* (c. 30). Refusing God's counsel, the leaders of Judah are going down to Egypt for help (vv. 1-2). But the Egyptian aid will be in vain (v. 7). God's message is: "Their strength is to sit still"; that is, quietly trust in the Lord instead of making foreign alliances. To those who have hurried to Egypt the Lord says: "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (v. 15). But they refused: "Ye would not."

Then comes this very beautiful promise of divine guidance: "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it" (v. 21). If the people will refrain from making an alliance with Egypt and put their trust wholly in God, He will destroy the Assyrians with His word (v. 31).

5. *Woe to Those Who Trust in Egypt* (cc. 31—32). As noted above, Isaiah was a clearheaded statesman as well as an inspired prophet. He saw full well the folly of turning to Egypt for help. That nation itself was soon to be conquered by Assyria. To be involved in an alliance with Egypt would result only in suffering double punishment at the hands of the Assyrians. So he cried out: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots . . . ; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel!" (31:1; cf. 30:2)

God was a far greater defense for Judah than the horses and chariots of Egypt could be. In one of his many beautiful promises, Isaiah says: "As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it" (31:5). What more could Judah ask!

The prophet predicted that the Israelites would put away their idols (31:7). Then God would defeat and drive back the Assyrians by His own power (31:8).

Again comes one of the many Messianic passages in Isaiah: "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness . . . And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest" (32: 1-2).

One characteristic of Isaiah is his powerful and very pointed condemnation of the women of Judah (32:9-12; cf. 3:16-24). It is always true: as go the women, so goes the nation. The women can do more to raise or ruin a country than men can ever do. The prophet sees no hope "until the spirit [Spirit] be poured upon us from on high" (32:15).

The pro-Egyptian party was constantly urging a military alliance with that country. But Isaiah's consistent advice, coupled with promise, closes this section. He says: "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.

And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (32:17-18). The only thing that need concern the people was to be righteous; then God would protect them.

6. *Woe to the Spoiler* (c. 33). The Assyrians had been destroying nations right and left. Now they would themselves be destroyed.

Says the prophet to the people: "Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times" (v. 6). They needed to forget Egypt, take his advice, and trust in God. It was not Egypt but the Lord, their Judge, Lawgiver, King—"he will save us" (v. 22).

### B. Threat and Promise (cc. 34—35)

George L. Robinson writes: "The most striking feature of these prophecies is the constant alternation of threat and promise."[8] This is well illustrated by the two chapters in this section: the first is mainly a warning of judgment, while the second is one of the most beautiful passages of promise in the entire Old Testament—a chapter that might well be memorized.

1. *Judgment on Edom* (c. 34). Edom—here called by its later name, Idumea (vv. 5-6)—had been Israel's sworn enemy (cf. Obadiah). God refers to the nation as "the people of my curse" (v. 5). Judgment and desolation are to befall those who had persecuted the Israelites on their way to Canaan.

2. *A Poem of Promise* (c. 35). This is one of the many beautiful devotional passages in Isaiah. Outside the Psalms there is no richer book in the Old Testament on which the Christian may meditate. Those who love their Bibles turn often to Isaiah for comfort and strength. This chapter is a paean of praise that defies brief treatment. We commend it to the reader.

## V. HISTORY OF HEZEKIAH'S TIME (cc. 36—39)

It is commonly held that chapters 38 and 39 precede chronologically chapters 36 and 37. The order may be due to the fact that the story of Assyria's invasion (701 B.C.), told in chapters 36 and 37, fits more naturally with chapters 1—35, whereas the mention in chapter 38 of Hezekiah's illness (714 B.C.) and in chapter 39 of the Babylonian embassy (712 B.C.) ties in more closely with what follows. These four chapters form a transition from the first part of Isaiah (cc. 1—35) to the second (cc. 40—66). They comprise a historical interlude between the two.

This section is duplicated almost verbatim in II Kings 18:13—20:19. It was a great deliverance God wrought for His people, worthy of retelling.

### A. Sennacherib's Invasion (cc. 36—37)

1. *The Siege of Jerusalem* (36:1—37:8). In 701 B.C.—difficult to identify with "the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah" (36:1)—Sennacherib invaded Judah and captured many of its cities. According to the Assyrian annals he took forty-six cities.

Lingering at Lachish, Sennacherib sent the Rabshakeh —literally, "chief of the officers"—up to Jerusalem with a great army (36:2). This clever representative of his monarch tried first to bluff the city into surrendering. Standing near the walls, he sent an arrogant message to Hezekiah, whom he disdained to honor with the title "king." Rather it is: "Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria" (36:4). But this was to be countered later with Isaiah's "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel" (37:21). It was a duel between God and Sennacherib.

The Rabshakeh rightly reproved Judah for trusting "in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt" (36:6). But when he mocked them for trusting in Jehovah (v. 7) he went too far. The biting, bitter sarcasm of his talk is

shown by his questioning whether they can furnish 2,000 captives to ride his horses (v. 8).

When the representatives from Hezekiah requested the Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic ("Syrian") rather than in Hebrew ("the Jews' language"), so as not to scare the people listening on the walls, the Assyrian officer answered with vulgar abandon. The honor of a holy God was clearly at stake as the Rabshakeh hurled his threats loudly at God's people (36:13-21).

When his words were reported to Hezekiah, the king rent his clothes as a sign of deep sorrow, put on sackcloth, and went into the Temple (37:1). He sent word to Isaiah, asking him to pray (vv. 2-4). The prophet bade the king not to be afraid of the Assyrian blasphemies, for a rumor would cause the enemy to leave (vv. 6-8).

2. *The Threatening Letter* (37:9-38). Though the Assyrians had to raise the siege in order to face the Ethiopians, they sent a threatening letter to Hezekiah. The king took it into the Temple and "spread it before the Lord" (v. 14). In answer to his prayer God assured him that Jerusalem would be spared (vv. 21-35). That night "the angel of the Lord" smote 185,000 Assyrian soldiers and the danger was ended.

### B. Hezekiah's Illness and Error (cc. 38—39)

1. *The Sickness and Cure* (c. 38). Isaiah informed the king that he was to die of his serious illness. But when Hezekiah prayed and wept God extended his life fifteen years. Hezekiah expressed his gratitude in a hymn of thanksgiving (vv. 9-20). The method of cure is described as a poultice of figs (c. 39).

2. *The Embassy from Babylon* (c. 39). Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah to congratulate him on his recovery. Proudly the king of Judah showed the Babylonians all his rich treas-

ures of silver and gold. Isaiah the prophet warned him that one day the Babylonians would return to seize all the wealth they had seen and carry his descendants into captivity.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Compare the characters of the four kings mentioned in Isaiah 1:1 (see II Chronicles 26—32).
2. Where and when did Isaiah prophesy?
3. What is the main emphasis of chapters 1—5?
4. Describe the vision of chapter 6 and discuss its significance.
5. What was the relation of Assyria, Syria, Israel, and Judah?
6. Against what foreign nations did Isaiah utter oracles?
7. Isaiah warned against foreign alliances with what two nations?
8. Summarize the history of Hezekiah's time.

Chapter Two

## THE PROPHET OF COMFORT

(Isaiah 40—66)

The change of tone beginning at the first verse of chapter 40 is very marked. Whereas the main emphasis of the first thirty-nine chapters is on judgment, the constantly recurring note of chapters 40—66 is comfort and promise.

In recent years it has been increasingly assumed that the second part was not written by the Isaiah of the eighth century B.C. but by a so-called Second Isaiah about the middle of the sixth century. It is claimed that the point of view displayed here is that of the latter part of the Babylonian captivity, when the people are beginning to look forward to returning to their own land. Especially is it contended that no one in the eighth century could possibly have predicted by name the coming of Cyrus (44:28; 45:1) to allow the Jews to return to Palestine.

The crux of the matter is whether one can believe in a supernatural inspiration, for that is the only way this phenomenon can be explained. This brief study does not permit a further discussion of the question. But one may take comfort from the fact that an outstanding Old Testament scholar, George L. Robinson, after a lifelong study of Isaiah, wrote in the revised edition (1938) of his excellent brief *Book of Isaiah* these words: "Frequently through the years my friends have asked me, 'Do you still believe in the unity of Isaiah?' and frankly I have invariably answered: 'Am more convinced than ever.' "[9]

One of the arguments that Robinson emphasizes is that the divine name, "the Holy One of Israel"—found twenty-five times in Isaiah and only six times in all the

rest of the Old Testament—occurs almost equally in the two parts: twelve times in chapters 1—39 and thirteen times in chapters 40—66. He says: "The presence of this divine name in all the different portions of the book is of more value in identifying Isaiah as the author of these prophecies than though his name had been inscribed at the beginning of every chapter."[10]

## I. THE FOLLY OF IDOLATRY (cc. 40—48)

### A. Israel's Incomparable God (c. 40)

The fortieth chapter of Isaiah is one of the most eloquent orations in all literature. It is said that Edmund Burke, one of the greatest orators England ever had, used to read from the Book of Isaiah before going to Parliament.

1. *Comfort Ye* (vv. 1-11). The opening words of this chapter strike the keynote of the second part of the book. After threatening warnings, God now speaks with comforting assurance.

The third verse is quoted in every one of the four Gospels, in connection with the ministry of John the Baptist. How one may prepare the way of the Lord is indicated in the fourth verse: filling in the valleys, cutting down the hills, straightening out the curves, and smoothing out the bumps. This is God's fourfold formula for a revival. When it is followed, the promise is ours: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (v. 5). That is real revival.

The tender care of God for His own is expressed very beautifully in verse 11: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

2. *Israel's Incomparable God* (vv. 12-31). The greatness of God is described in terms of omnipotence (v. 12),

omniscience (vv. 13-14), and transcendence (vv. 15-17). Then comes the keynote of this section: "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" (v. 18) This is repeated in verse 25: "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One." The complete contrast between the true God and dumb idols (vv. 19-24) is vividly pointed out. The chapter closes with a combined admonition and promise: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

### B. The Power of Prediction (c. 41)

The second verse of this chapter apparently refers to Cyrus. It is an anticipation of the more specific prophecy in 44:28—45:13.

Two of the most precious promises in God's Word appear in this chapter, in verses 10 and 13: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee."

The supreme proof of the fact that Jehovah alone is the true God is His power to predict the future. Repeatedly the challenge is thrown out to the false gods of the foreign nations to prove their deity by predicting the future. This begins in verse 22—"Declare us things for to come"—and continues into verse 23: "Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." Israel's God alone knows the future.

### C. The Servant of the Lord (c. 42)

After having announced the sole sovereignty of Jehovah to Israel in chapter 40 and to the heathen in chapter 41, Isaiah now proclaims God's great missionary

program of evangelizing the nations. This note that is prominent in chapters 40—66 has caused people to refer sometimes to the book as the "Gospel according to Isaiah."

1. *The First Servant Song* (vv. 1-9). This paragraph is the first of four "servant songs" in Isaiah. The second is 49:1-13, the third 50:4-11, the fourth 52:13—53:12.

While "the servant of the Lord" is the main theme of the next section (cc. 49—57), it already appears as a rather prominent topic in this section. The first mention is in 41:8-9. There Israel is identified as "my servant." In most of the servant passages in chapters 40—48 the emphasis is on the nation of Israel as being the servant of the Lord. That is the standard Jewish interpretation to this day.

But in the "servant songs" there is more evidence for identification of the servant as an individual. The Christian interpretation allows both applications: in a limited sense to the nation of Israel, and in a much fuller sense to Israel's Messiah.

The language of this first servant song is strongly personal. It is "he" and "him" and "his." God's Spirit will be on him (v. 1). He will be gentle and meek (v. 2), as Jesus certainly was.

In addition to the gentleness of the servant, his world-wide mission is emphasized (vv. 1, 4, 6). His ministry is described as opening blind eyes and freeing prisoners from prison (v. 7). The song ends with the note of prediction of the future.

2. *A Mosaic* (vv. 10-25). As often occurs in the prophetic books, the remainder of this chapter is a composite of various items, the relation of which is difficult to perceive. Here we find praise (vv. 10-12), judgment (vv. 13-15), promise (v. 16), contempt of idols (v. 17), another reference to the Lord's servant (v. 18), and punishment of Israel's sins (vv. 22-25).

### D. Redemption (c. 43)

Israel belonged to God by both creation and redemption (v. 1). The second verse sounds like a description of the sufferings of Judah in the Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah's emphasis on monotheism bulks large throughout this section. Jehovah declares: "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (v. 10). With regard to redemption he adds: "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour" (v. 11).

The thirteenth verse is an interesting example of how words have changed their meaning since the time of the King James Version. "Who shall let it?" sounds like an invitation to allow God to work. The writer has heard it used that way as the text for a sermon on consecration. But the Hebrew original does not mean that at all. It is a challenge that God throws out to His opponents: "I will work, and who is going to stop it!" In old English "let" sometimes meant "hinder." It always means the opposite today.

Another redemption note appears in verse 25: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

Again in this chapter, as in 42:9, the Lord says that He is going to do a "new thing" (v. 19). This may look forward to the return from exile.

### E. The Absurdity of Idolatry (c. 44)

The sharpest attack on the worship of images—among many others in this section—comes in this chapter (vv. 9-20). After declaring, "Beside me there is no God" (v. 6), and further, "Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any," Jehovah proceeds through His prophet to show the utter senselessness of idolatry. A man cuts down a tree. Part of it he burns for fuel, and the remainder he carves into a god and worships it. What folly!

A glorious redemption passage occurs in verses 21-23. Verse 22 is very much like 43:25. This is Isaiah's gospel. Redemption brings forgiveness of sins.

F. Cyrus, God's Servant (c. 45)

1. *The Lord's Anointed* (44:28—45:4). Cyrus will be God's "shepherd" to order the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its Temple (44:28). More amazingly, he is called the Lord's "messiah" (Hebrew for "anointed"). He would function as a messiah for the Jews, freeing them from captivity and restoring them to their land. God had called and named him, though Cyrus himself did not know Jehovah (v. 4).

2. *No Other God* (vv. 5-25). The monotheistic refrain is sounded here with increased emphasis: "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (v. 5); "I am the Lord, and there is none else" (vv. 6, 18); "There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me" (v. 21). This only God is also the only Saviour: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (v. 22). It is difficult to see how monotheism could be expressed more emphatically. Jehovah is not only Israel's true God; He is the only God who exists. The gods of the nations are only creatures of their thoughts.

G. The Fall of Babylon (cc. 46—47)

1. *The Overthrow of Its Religion* (c. 46). Bel was the chief god of the Babylonian religion; Nebo was the interpreter of the gods. But their lifeless weight was a weary burden to the beasts that bore them (v. 1). These gods had no power to lift; instead they were all helpless, taken into captivity (v. 2). In contrast, Jehovah carries His people (vv. 3-4), from the cradle to the grave.

Again God throws out the challenge: "To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?" (v. 5) The absurdity of idolatry is

once more underscored (vv. 6-7). Over and over the monotheistic note is struck: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (v. 9). His deity is shown, as often repeated in this section, by the fact that He is capable of "declaring the end from the beginning" (v. 10).

2. *The Overthrow of the City* (c. 47). The shame of Babylon's disgraceful fall is vividly described (vv. 1-5). She had treated God's people with criminal cruelty (v. 6). Now her destruction has come, and none of her religious helpers can save her (vv. 12-14).

### H. A Summary (c. 48)

The recurring emphases of this section (cc. 40—48) are caught up here in conclusion. Jehovah is the only One who can predict the future (vv. 3-8). The idols cannot (v. 5). Israel has been put in the furnace of affliction that she may be refined (v. 10). God is the Creator (v. 13). The people were to leave Babylon, that all the world might know that God had redeemed His people (v. 20).

Again we note a precious promise, in verse 17: "Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go."

## II. THE SERVANT OF THE LORD (cc. 49—57)

Already in the previous section the prophet had mentioned the servant of the Lord some dozen times. But now it becomes the dominant theme. (Three of the four "servant songs" are in this section.)

### A. Salvation (c. 49)

1. *The Second Servant Song* (vv. 1-13). The servant seems first to be identified as Israel (v. 3). But then he is stated to be God's servant "to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel . . . for a

light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (v. 6). The servant is thus differentiated from the nation he restores. Some have interpreted the servant as being the faithful remnant in Israel. But clearly the highest fulfillment of this language can be found only in Christ.

2. *The Restoration of Israel* (vv. 14-26). The universal outlook is more prominent in Isaiah than in any other Old Testament prophet. The result of the restoration of Israel will be that "all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob" (v. 26).

### B. The Suffering Servant (c. 50)

1. *Self-sold for Sin* (vv. 1-3). Jehovah reminds the people that it is their own sins that have caused them to be sold into slavery (v. 1). He could have saved them, but they would not listen (v. 2).

2. *The Third Servant Song* (vv. 4-11). The personal note is dominant here. We are given a preview of the Suffering Servant described at greater length in the fifty-third chapter. Speaking in the first person the servant describes himself thus: "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (v. 6). Only in Christ did this find complete fulfillment.

The servant's determination to be true to his mission is expressed in these words: "I have set my face like a flint" (v. 7). That is what Jesus did as He marched to Jerusalem (cf. Mark 10:32) and prayed in Gethsemane.

### C. Hearken and Awake (51:1—52:12)

1. *Hearken* (51:1-8). Three times in these eight verses God through His prophet bids His people hearken (vv. 1, 4, 7). In the first instance He tells them to remember their origin. Just as He blessed Abraham, so He will

bless them. In the second He asks them to recognize His law. In the third He exhorts them not to fear the reproaches of men.

2. *Awake* (51:9—52:12). Three times the prophet cries, "Awake, awake" (51:9, 17; 52:1). The first is a call to God to waken on behalf of His people. In response comes the promise of redemption and restoration: "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (51:11).

In the second instance it is a call to Jerusalem to awake and stand up, for her punishment will be ended in blessing. The third call is again to Jerusalem. She is to awake and put on her beautiful garments, for no more will she be oppressed (52:1). Frequently in these chapters God comforts His people.

### D. The Fourth Servant Song (52:13—53:12)

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah should begin with 52:13, where "my servant" is introduced. It is generally acknowledged that this is the climax of Hebrew prophecy. Robinson says: "The profoundest thoughts in the Old Testament revelation are to be found in this section. . . . It holds first place in Messianic prophecy."[11]

It was the fifty-third of Isaiah which the Ethiopian eunuch was reading in his chariot when Philip approached (Acts 8:32). The evangelist was able to show him that the words applied to Jesus as the Suffering Servant of the Lord. No other passage portrays this aspect quite so clearly.

The words of the third verse have gripped the imaginations of men everywhere: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." It is said that when Handel reached this point in the composition of *The Messiah* he was found weeping

with his head on the table. No thoughtful person can read these sacred words without being moved by them.

But the fourth verse makes a very important advance: His sufferings were not for himself, but for us. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows."

This vicarious aspect is carried still further in the fifth verse, where the purpose and result of His suffering are emphasized: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Then comes the passage that strikes a responsive chord in the heart of every penitent sinner: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6). No wonder this is called the Gospel of Isaiah!

The meek submission of Christ before the high priest and Pilate are prefigured in verse 7. His vicarious death is emphasized again in verse 8.

His death is not only vicarious but efficacious: "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin . . . He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (vv. 10-11). The Father would be satisfied with His Son's sacrifice and accept it for the justification of many.

The song closes on the redemptive note: "He was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

*Man of sorrows, what a name*
*For the Son of God who came*
*Ruined sinners to reclaim;*
*Hallelujah, what a Saviour!*

### E. Restoration Through Redemption (c. 54)

Redemption is costly business. It involves sacrifice and suffering (c. 53). But it brings blessing and joy. The atmosphere of chapter 54 is that of redeemed captives singing and rejoicing.

The second verse is a constant challenge to every Christian: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes." God wants us to keep enlarging our lives continually, both inwardly in a spiritual experience and outwardly in effective service. But one dare not lengthen his cords unless he strengthens his stakes. The larger the tent and the longer its ropes, the more firmly the pegs must be driven into the ground, or the big tent will come down. This is what has happened to some Christian workers. Changing to the modern figure of the skyscraper: to go higher one must first go deeper. The stability of the superstructure depends on the strength of the foundation.

One phase of Isaiah's evangelism is shown in his emphasis on universality. He had a wider outlook than almost any other writer of the Old Testament. Salvation is for the gentiles as well as the Jews. "Thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles" (v. 3). "The God of the whole earth shall he be called" (v. 5).

### F. The Gospel Invitation (c. 55)

The fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah contains one of the finest anticipations of evangelistic preaching in this age to be found in the Old Testament. Salvation is free (v. 1). "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," (v. 6) is just as meaningful today as it was two thousand years ago. So is the next verse: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and

he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

The words of the eleventh verse have comforted preachers countless times: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

And who has not been thrilled with the last two verses? We can quote only verse 12: "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." This is one chapter that every Christian ought to memorize.

### G. Judgment and Justice (cc. 56—57)

1. *Importance of the Sabbath* (56:1-8). A special blessing is pronounced on those who keep the Sabbath and do not pollute it (v. 2). Sabbath desecration is one of the most glaring sins in America today. The true Christian will bear faithful witness by refusing to buy on Sunday at the many stores now staying open. The easier it is to desecrate God's holy day, the more dangerous becomes the temptation. This is one point at which we must be different, not indifferent.

Those who keep the Lord's day holy will be made joyful in the house of prayer, and the offerings they bring will be accepted (v. 7). One cannot spend Sunday afternoon in secular pursuits, to say nothing of worldly indulgence, and expect to be blessed at church. The verse ends with the universal note again: "Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."

2. *Blind Watchmen and Dumb Dogs* (56:9—57:2). In Israel then, as too often today, the shepherds of God's flock were like blind watchmen and dumb dogs. They

were greedy for selfish gain, instead of caring for the sheep.

3. *Idolatry Again* (57:3-21). One of the main causes of the Babylonian captivity was the idolatry of the Israelites. In that furnace of affliction they were purged of their love for idols, so that since then they have never fallen into that evil, though before that they had done so frequently since the days of the Exodus. The point of view of chapter 57 is therefore pre-exilic.

The people of Judah had stooped to the most abhorrent kinds of idolatry, sacrificing their own children on the altars of false gods (v. 5). That is still being done spiritually today by those who sacrifice their children to Mammon and Pleasure.

Yet framed in this black background is a sparkling gem: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (v. 15). The absolute prerequisite for fellowship with God is humility.

This section of the book ends, as did the previous one (see 48:22), with the statement: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

## III. FUTURE GLORY OF GOD'S PEOPLE (cc. 58—66)

Suffering always precedes glory. Isaiah was surely outstanding among the prophets who "inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (I Peter 1:10-11). So this section on future glory follows that on the Suffering

Servant of the Lord. It is still true that the Christian must, as his Lord, experience suffering before he can enjoy glory.

### A. Fasting and Sabbath Observance (c. 58)

1. *Fasting* (vv. 1-12). The people were going through the outward forms of religion, but their hearts were far from God. They fasted, but they did it in a harsh, legalistic way (vv. 3-4). As has been well observed, the Bible does not say, "Fast and work," but, "Fast and pray." The only spiritual value in fasting consists of the attitude of extreme earnestness and unselfish sacrifice that it both betokens and engenders. (There is no benefit in fasting if we spend the time as usual in work or pleasure.) It is only as a means to concentrated, uninterrupted praying that it has value. Fasting is not a mechanical manipulation of Deity to effect the results we desire. That is magic, not true religion. (We do not *compel* God by our fasting, but we are thereby enabled to entreat Him more humbly and earnestly.)

It is indicated that the true fast (vv. 5-7) consists of a right attitude of kindness, justice, generosity, and proper attention to family fellowship—"hide not thyself from thine own flesh." It is sometimes easier to run away from life into seclusion than it is to face it with a truly Christlike spirit of love.

The true fast will produce light, not gloom (vv. 8-12). It will bring glad joy and good health (v. 8). It will bring the desired result: assurance that God is hearing our prayers (v. 9). The most important product of prayer, divine guidance, is then guaranteed: "And the Lord shall guide thee continually" (v. 11).

2. *Sabbath Observance* (vv. 13-14). The Lord's day is not for work or pleasure, but for rest and worship. The true Christian will not read secular literature nor

watch secular entertainment on television on Sunday. There are so many good, spiritual books to be read and so many opportunities for Christian service to others that there is no excuse for seeking one's "own ways" on Sunday.

### B. Sin and Salvation (c. 59)

1. *Sin* (vv. 1-8). The first two verses proclaim the important principle that lack of salvation is not due to God's inability—"The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save"—nor to His unwillingness—"neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear"—but rather to man's sin—"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." Sin is the only thing that separates man from God.

The depth of Israel's sin is described in vivid terms in verses 3-8. The last two verses are quoted in Romans 3:15-17 in a portrait of the natural man, apart from God.

2. *Confession* (vv. 9-15). Conscious of her sin, Israel confesses them to God. This is always the path from sinfulness to salvation.

3. *Salvation* (vv. 16-21). Though there was no man to intercede, God himself wrought salvation. The people's confession paved the way for Him to do it. To those who trust Him the promise is given: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (v. 19).

### C. The Blessings of Redemption (cc. 60—61)

1. *A World-wide Gospel* (c. 60). In this chapter Isaiah's characteristic emphasis on the universality of redemption comes out most fully. In the third verse he says: "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Again he cries: "The forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee" (v. 5). The

same thought is repeated in verse 11. In other words, the salvation of Israel would result in spiritual blessing to the whole world. Obviously this prophecy has found its fulfillment only in Christ and the salvation He has provided for the whole world. The blessing poured out upon the Jews in such abundant measure on the Day of Pentecost soon reached around the Roman Empire. It was promised that the light of God's presence would never go out (vv. 19-22).

2. *The Blessings of Salvation* (c. 61). The first verse and the beginning of the second were quoted by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth and declared by Him as fulfilled in himself (Luke 4:16-21). They are another description of the Servant of the Lord. Jesus stopped at "the acceptable year of the Lord" because that described the salvation He provided in His first coming. "The day of vengeance of our God" refers to the Second Coming.

The plan and purpose of God was that all the people of Israel should be "priests of the Lord" and "ministers of our God" (v. 6), to bring the blessings of heaven to all the inhabitants of earth. But they failed in their mission, except in furnishing the Old Testament Scriptures and the Messiah. It was Christ, the individual Servant of the Lord, who became the means of salvation for the whole world.

### D. Israel's Salvation (62:1—63:6)

1. *Jerusalem Restored* (62:1-9). God promises that He will not rest until Jerusalem shines as a bright light seen by all the gentiles. She will become "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord" (v. 3). Jerusalem has been like a "forsaken" widow, her land "desolate." But she will be called Hephzibah—"my delight is in her"—and her land Beulah—"married" (v. 4). The people are exhorted to pray that Jerusalem will be made "a praise in the earth" (v. 7).

2. *The Holy People* (62:10-12). When a highway has been built (cf. 40:3) God will come speedily in salvation. Then His people will be called "The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord," and Jerusalem will be called, "Sought out, A city not forsaken" (v. 12).

3. *The Day of Vengeance* (63:1-6). The first three verses of this chapter are often used as the basis for an evangelistic message on the death of Christ, whose garments are stained with His own blood, shed for the salvation of sinners. But even a superficial reading of the passage shows that the reference is to the destruction of God's enemies. It is their blood, not Christ's, that is shed. This passage applies to the second coming of Christ in judgment, not to His first coming in sacrifice.

### E. Israel's Prayer (63:7—64:12)

1. *An Appeal to the Past* (63:7-19). The praying "servants" (v. 17) of the Lord call attention to His wondrous dealings with Israel under Moses (vv. 11-14). As He had redeemed His people from Egyptian bondage, so He must restore them from Babylonian captivity. For the point of view here is definitely that of the Exile. The tribes need to be returned (v. 17), and "our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary" (v. 18).

The tenth and eleventh verses are of special interest as being the only place in the Old Testament where the expression "holy spirit" is used of God's Spirit, except Psalms 51:11.

2. *A Petition for the Present* (c. 64). The words of the first verse have often been echoed by those who were burdened for revival: "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence!" And the fourth verse has many times engendered faith for blessings beyond anything anticipated.

The figure of the potter and the clay (v. 8) has always had its appeal. Jeremiah develops more vividly the figure, which is only mentioned here.

The point of view of the Babylonian captivity seems definitely indicated in verses 10 and 11: "Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house [Solomon's Temple], where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire." The Assyrian invasions of Isaiah's day (eighth century B.C.) had caused much desolation to Judah. But the Temple burned with fire—that seems to require the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

For many Old Testament scholars that settles the date of the "Second Isaiah" (cc. 40—66). But those who accept supernatural inspiration have no difficulty in believing that the prophet could have projected himself, in the Spirit, across two centuries to the time of the Captivity. The basic issue at stake is a belief or disbelief in divine inspiration. It must be insisted that even if one were to place the writing of "Deutero-Isaiah" in the sixth century, there still remain flashes of clear vision into the unknown future which cannot be explained on a merely human basis.

### F. God's Answer (cc. 65—66)

1. *A Rebellious People* (65:1-16). "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people" (v. 2). Instead of listening to Jehovah, they are plunging more deeply into idolatry (vv. 3-4). And yet they say, "I am holier than thou" (v. 5).

But there is a faithful remnant (vv. 8-10). They are called "mine elect," "my servants" (v. 9). God will give His land to "my people that have sought me" (v. 10).

The rebellious, however, will be slain. Not only did they not seek God; they refused to respond when He

sought them (v. 12). His "servants" will be cared for, but they will suffer punishment (vv. 13-15).

2. *New Heavens and a New Earth* (65:17-25). The Messianic age is described as a time of rejoicing and longevity of life (vv. 18-20), of prosperity and peace (vv. 21-25). The humble and obedient can claim the promise: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (v. 24). Verse 25 is a brief echo of the fuller description found in 11:6-9, when even ferocious beasts will not harm any other creatures. This language may be taken symbolically of the spiritual experience of sanctified Christians in this age. How much of a literal fulfillment will take place in a millennial kingdom on earth we shall have to wait to see. Meanwhile the important thing is to be sure that Christ's kingdom is fully established in our hearts. Only by a complete consecration to His will can we enjoy these blessings now.

3. *Final Message of Comfort* (c. 66). The keynote of this closing chapter is found in verse 13: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." Divine love is thus expressed in tender terms. But this comfort is promised to the one who is "poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (v. 2; cf. v. 5).

The question, "Shall a nation be born at once?" received a striking answer on May 15, 1948, when the new nation of Israel suddenly and unexpectedly came into being, after almost exactly two thousand years of no independent existence (since 63 B.C.). Surely the stage is set, as never before during this age, for the second coming of Christ.

But future blessing for God's people in "the new heavens and the new earth" (v. 22), with "all flesh" worshiping Him (v. 23), must inevitably be accompanied by punishment for the wicked. The terrible words of the

last verse of Isaiah—"Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched"—were repeated by Jesus in His warning of Gehenna fire (Mark 9:48).

### Questions for Discussion

1. What change of tone takes place in Isaiah 40?
2. Discuss the unity of Isaiah.
3. What is the main emphasis of chapters 40—48?
4. Who is "the servant of the Lord"?
5. List all the specific prophecies of Christ in Isaiah 53.
6. What does Isaiah say about the Sabbath?

CHAPTER THREE

## THE WEEPING PROPHET

Jeremiah 1—25

*Name:* means "whom Jehovah has appointed."

*Home:* Anathoth, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem.

*Date of ministry:* 626-586 B.C.

*Place of ministry:* southern Kingdom of Judah

*Outline of book:*

I. Prophecies Concerning Judah (cc. 1—25)
II. Personal Life of the Prophet (cc. 26—45)
III. Prophecies Concerning Foreign Nations (cc. 46—51)
IV. Historical Appendix (c. 52)

*Verses to memorize:* 6:16; 10:23; 17:7, 9; 29:13; 33:3

### INTRODUCTION

The prophet Jeremiah is one of the most unique characters in the Old Testament. We know more about his personality than that of any other writing prophet. So pronounced is it that he is universally referred to as "the weeping prophet."

There are several passages in the book to support this description. Outstanding among them is 9:1—"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" The traditional assignment of the Book of Lamentations to Jeremiah has served to confirm the characterization.

It was the sad fate of this prophet to preside over the fall of his people. He had to stand and watch the country go into eclipse, without being able to do any-

thing about it. His was the unwelcome and unappreciated task of announcing the doom of the nation and the destruction of its capital. Three times he was commanded: "Pray not for this people" (7:16; 11:14; 14:11). What sadder mission could a prophet possibly have?

The public ministry of Jeremiah coincided with the closing days of the Kingdom of Judah. Through the reigns of its last five kings he pleaded in vain for the repentance that alone could save the nation and avert its doom. Before his weeping eyes Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah went into captivity.

Though a Spirit-inspired prophet, Jeremiah was intensely human. The frequent autobiographical notes in his book reveal a personality that was keenly sensitive to the attitudes of those about him. This was not a sign of weak character, for the same feature is evident in the Epistles of Paul. Rather, it indicates that he was very much alive and alert.

Jeremiah was pre-eminently the persecuted prophet. Again and again we read that he was punished or imprisoned. Priests and prophets, princes and people—all turned against him. It must have seemed to him at times that it was a case of Jeremiah against the whole world. Only God stood with him.

## I. THE PROPHET'S CALL (c. 1)

### A. The Heading (vv. 1-3)

In every one of the twelve Minor Prophets the first verse comprises the heading. (Obadiah's opening verse should be divided.) This was also true of Isaiah. But in the case of Jeremiah and Ezekiel the heading includes the first three verses.

Jeremiah is identified as a priest living in Anathoth. This priestly village (Joshua 21:18) was a northern suburb of Jerusalem. The latter city was originally "in the land of Benjamin," with the tribal boundary running

through the Valley of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem. But David had chosen it as his capital city (II Samuel 5:6-9), and henceforth it was counted with Judah.

Three kings are mentioned here: Josiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah. The first reigned from about 638 to 608 B.C. "The thirteenth year of his reign" would therefore be 626 B.C. Jehoiakim and Zedekiah each ruled for eleven years. Between Josiah and Jehoiakim, and likewise between Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, a king reigned for three months. These two are not mentioned here. Zedekiah's reign ended with "the carrying away of Jerusalem captive" in 586 B.C. As in the case of Isaiah, Jeremiah's active ministry lasted forty years.

### B. The Call (vv. 4-10)

Jeremiah was informed that he was sanctified (set part) before birth and ordained a "prophet unto the nations." His ministry was to reach beyond Judah.

The reaction of the young prophet was immediate and emphatic: "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." This verse gives no support to "child preachers" six or eight years of age. Probably Jeremiah was around twenty years old. The Levites were not supposed to minister until they were thirty years old (Numbers 4:3), and Jeremiah knew that he had not reached the normal age for public ministry. He was still a "child."

Jeremiah's ministry was "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (v. 10). The ground must be cleared before a new structure can be erected. It is still so in evangelistic preaching.

### C. Two Visions (vv. 11-16)

1. *An Almond Tree* (vv. 11-12). The point of this vision is lost in English translation, for it consists of a play on words in the Hebrew. "Almond tree" is *shaked*,

while "hasten" is *shoqedh*. This symbolized the fact that God was going to punish His people soon. "The almond tree is the first to awaken in spring; so Yahweh is as one awaking, rising up in judgment."[1]

2. *A Seething Pot* (vv. 13-16). This vision signified that the judgment was to come from the north. Since invaders from the Mesopotamian area came by way of the Fertile Crescent they actually arrived in Palestine from the north. So this could apply to the Babylonians.

### D. The Need for Courage (v. 17)

Jeremiah was warned that his preaching would meet with sharp opposition. But God would be with Him. The prophet must be courageous in facing the people.

## II. TREACHEROUS JUDAH (cc. 2—6)

### A. Twin Sins (2:1—3:5)

1. *Forsaking God* (2:1-13). The thirteenth verse connects the two parts of the second chapter: "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." They had forsaken God for foreign alliances that could not really help.

In the first part of the chapter, then, the charge of idolatry is made against them. They have exchanged the true God, who miraculously delivered them from Egyptian bondage (v. 6), for the false gods of the heathen (v. 11). It was a bad bargain.

2. *Seeking Foreign Alliances* (2:14—3:5). Instead of trusting God, the people of Judah were turning south to Egypt or north to Assyria (2:18). "Sihor" means "muddy river" and probably refers to the Nile, in Egypt. "The river" in the Old Testament usually means the Euphrates, in the vicinity of which Assyria was located. Judah was refusing "the fountain of living waters" to drink of these rivers.

Man cannot wash away his own sins, no matter how hard he tries (2:22). Idolatry was Israel's besetting sin. Solomon had introduced the worship of Baal (2:8), the chief god of Phoenicia. The masculine plural "Baalim" (2:23) is often used to refer to the male gods as a whole, while Ashtaroth (feminine plural) refers to the goddesses. So prevalent had idolatry become that the prophet could say: "According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah" (2:28).

Assyria had not helped them (cf. Isaiah). Now they were turning to Egypt. In despair Jeremiah asks: "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria" (2:36). The fickleness of Judah was pathetic.

Idolatry is labeled harlotry (3:1-5; cf. 2:20). Hosea had likewise charged Israel in his day with spiritual adultery.

### B. Treacherous Judah (3:6—4:2)

1. *Judah Worse than Israel* (3:6-11). This section records the second prophetic message, given "in the days of Josiah the king" (v. 6). Evidently the national reform instituted by Josiah, after the discovery in the Temple of the book of the law (II Kings 22—23), had been sadly superficial. Judah is accused of having turned to the Lord, not "with her whole heart, but feignedly" (v. 10). Though she had before her eyes the warning of the fate that had overtaken the northern Kingdom of Israel one hundred years before (in 722 B.C.), she continued on in her idolatry (harlotry, v. 8). In relation to Israel she is twice called "her treacherous sister Judah" (vv. 7-8). The Lord declares through His prophet: "Backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah" (v. 11).

2. *A Call to Backsliding Israel* (3:12—4:2). The prophet is commanded to "go and proclaim these words

toward the north" (i.e., Israel). The invitation is given to the remnant there—that had not gone into captivity—to return to the Lord (3:12). If they will acknowledge their sin, He will be merciful to them (3:13). The lesson of this oracle is that confession brings forgiveness.

### C. The Day of the Lord (4:3-31)

1. *A Call to Repentance* (vv. 3-4). Once more the prophet turns to Judah and Jerusalem. His cry is: "Break up your fallow ground." The hard, uncultivated ground of their hearts needed to be plowed with prayer and harrowed with repentance.

2. *The Scourge from the North* (vv. 5-18). The seething pot (1:13) is about to pour out its fury from the north in "great destruction" (v. 6). It will be an overwhelming invasion: "Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles" (v. 13). The only hope of escape is through turning away from sin (v. 14). The judgment on Judah is just: "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee" (v. 18).

3. *Utter Destruction* (vv. 19-31). This passage contains one of the most vivid descriptions of wide destruction to be found in the Bible. The expression "without form and void" is found only here (v. 23) and in Genesis 1:2, where it describes the primeval chaos. The effect on Jeremiah of this horrible picture was deep agony of heart (v. 19). The true prophet always pays the price of suffering because of the sins of the people.

### D. Wanted: a Man (c. 5)

This has sometimes been called the "Diogenes Chapter." As that Greek philosopher walked the streets of Athens in the daytime with a lighted lantern, looking for an honest man, so the prophet was told to search the streets of Jerusalem for a man of integrity. If he found one God would pardon the city.

But Israel and Judah had "dealt very treacherously" against the Lord (v. 11). They rejected His warnings, declaring that evil would not overtake them (v. 12). In reply God repeated the threat of invasion (v. 15). This would come because of their idolatry (v. 19). Then comes this plaintive cry: "Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you" (v. 25). Every sinner cheats himself.

### E. The Depth of Judah's Sin (c. 6)

The children of Benjamin living in Jerusalem are warned to flee southward to Tekoa, a village of shepherds twelve miles southeast of the capital, where Amos the prophet had lived. A beacon fire is to be lighted on the hill at Beth-haccerem, to guide them thither; "for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction" (v. 1).

The abundance of Judah's sin is described thus: "As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her wickedness" (v. 7). All the people, even the priests and prophets, are wicked (v. 13). The prophets, like false physicians, "have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (v. 14). While Jeremiah cried, "War!" (vv. 4-6), the false prophets soothed the people by saying, "Peace."

"Neither could they blush" (v. 15; cf. 8:12) expresses the blatant, brash attitude of the people, so often reflected today. Jeremiah pleaded with them to "ask for the old paths" (v. 16), but they refused. So they would be called "refuse silver," because God had refused, or rejected, them (v. 30).

## III. FALSE TRUST IN THE TEMPLE (cc. 7—10)

### A. The Temple Sermon (7:1—8:3)

The first verse of this section indicates that an important new message is about to be given. The prophet

is commanded to deliver this sermon "in the gate of the Lord's house."

The people are informed that the only thing that will save them from destruction is genuine repentance: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place." It is not yet too late to avert captivity.

The people of Jerusalem felt a false sense of security in the fact that the Temple was there (v. 4). Since this was inviolate the city was safe. But Jeremiah warned them that the first sacred shrine at Shiloh was now in ruins (v. 12). The same fate would overtake the Temple (v. 14). The people of Judah would go into captivity as had Israel (v. 15). Jeremiah was told not to pray for them, because God would not hear him (v. 16).

Verses 22 and 23 are a striking commentary on Samuel's words, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (I Samuel 15:22). Jeremiah preached a spiritual religion, rather than a formal one.

The people of Jeremiah's day were in a unique sense "the generation of his wrath" (v. 29). It was they who would be cast out of their land. But their evil was fully commensurate with their punishment. They had set up idols in the very house of God (v. 30). They had descended to the depths of idolatry by having their children burned in the fire to Molech. The Valley of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem, where this was going on, would become a valley of slaughter (vv. 31-33). "Their sanctuary was to become their cemetery."[2]

### B. Disobedience and Idolatry (8:4—10:25)

1. *Perpetual Backsliding* (8:4-9). The people of Jeremiah were sliding steadily backward toward the brim of the abyss. In spite of all the prophet could do, "they refuse to return."

2. *False Physicians* (8:10-22). Again the Lord says: "They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (v. 11). And then He asks: "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (v. 22)

3. *The Weeping Prophet* (9:1-8). The prophet is overcome with grief because his people are bringing on themselves such suffering for their sins. Their basic sin is deceitfulness (vv. 3-8).

4. *An Offended God* (9:9-26). Jerusalem and Judah are to be made utterly desolate (v. 11). Their inhabitants will be scattered among the heathen (v. 16). True wisdom is to know God (v. 24).

5. *The Folly of Idolatry* (c. 10). In almost every chapter the people of Judah are charged with the idolatrous worship of heathen gods. But this is one of the longer passages on the impotence of idols in contrast to the omnipotence of Jehovah (vv. 2-16).

The section ends with another prediction of the coming invasion from the north, which will "make the cities of Judah desolate, and a den of dragons" (v. 22). War clouds hung low all during the days of Jeremiah's ministry.

## IV. GOD'S COVENANT (cc. 11—12)

The mention here of God's covenant with Israel may reflect the finding of the book of the law in the Temple, resulting in Josiah's reformation in 621 B.C. So this prophecy may have been uttered near the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry.

### A. A Broken Covenant (11:1-10)

At Sinai, God had made a covenant with His people to give them the Promised Land (v. 5). But they had broken the covenant (v. 10) and so forfeited their right to live in Canaan.

B. Too Late to Pray (11:11-17)

A second time Jehovah commands Jeremiah not to pray for the people. They have refused to listen to Him and so He will not hear their prayer in their time of trouble (11:14).

C. The Conspiracy Against Jeremiah (11:18-23)

A secret plot against Jeremiah's life had been made by the men of Anathoth, his home town. He was like a lamb being led to the slaughter until God revealed to him their plans. It would not be long until they would be caught in the oncoming invasion against Jerusalem and destroyed.

D. The Prosperity of the Wicked (12:1-6)

The problem that confronted Jeremiah is age-old: "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" The prophet begged permission to reason the case with Jehovah (v. 1).

God's answer is given in the symbolical language of verse 5: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Jeremiah's problem was like racing fellow footmen. How would he make out racing chariot horses; that is, facing *real* difficulties? If in the quiet, open country he became weary, what would he do in the tangled, trackless jungle of the Jordan—the complicated troubles that lay just ahead? The conspiracy of the men of Anathoth was nothing compared with what was yet to come.

E. The Divine Lament (12:7-17)

As Jehovah contemplated the sad fate of His people, He expressed himself through His prophet in these words of sorrow. He had been compelled to forsake His house and heritage.

## V. FIVE WARNINGS (c. 13)

### A. The Marred Girdle (vv. 1-11)

One of the striking features of Jeremiah's ministry was that of acted parables. The prophet was commanded to procure a linen girdle, wear it, and then hide it in the hole of a rock at "Euphrates." (This could hardly mean the Euphrates River, some two hundred fifty miles away, but was probably a town three miles away with the same Hebrew name.) When Jeremiah went back for the girdle it was moldy and useless. The girdle was a symbol of the people of Israel and Judah, whom Jehovah had taken close to himself, but now they were "good for nothing" (v. 10).

### B. The Wine-filled Bottles (vv. 12-14)

God said that every bottle would be filled with wine. The people, interpreting this as signifying prosperity, agreed. But the divine meaning was that the people would be filled with drunkenness, so that they could not defend themselves. They would be dashed against each other like jars broken to bits.

### C. The People's Pride (vv. 15-17)

Pride always precedes destruction (cf. Proverbs 16:18). This was one of the main causes of Judah's downfall.

### D. The Royal Pride (vv. 18-20)

The king and queen—perhaps Jehoiachin and his mother (*ca.* 597 B.C.)—are commanded to humble themselves. Their realm is to be destroyed, the invasion even reaching to the cities of the Negev.

### E. Unchangeable Sin (vv. 21-27)

Judah could no more give up her habitual sinning than the Ethiopian could change his black skin or the

leopard his spots (v. 23). Only God could cleanse her, and Jerusalem refused to be made clean.

## VI. SYMBOLS OF DOOM (cc. 14—21)

### A. The Drought (cc. 14—15)

A drought is one of the greatest scourges in the East, where it can result in starvation for the masses. In the United States it has caused the pinch of poverty; but the suffering has been limited. However, the description in 14:1-6 of "no grass" for grazing would sound hauntingly familiar to some.

In spite of the warning drought—which was only a symbol of the coming destruction—the false prophets were telling the people that there would be neither sword nor famine (14:13). Once more we catch a glimpse of the weeping prophet: "Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day" (14:17).

The seriousness of Judah's sin is indicated very graphically by the Lord's assertion: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth" (15:1). These two greatest of Old Testament intercessors could not prevent God's judgments from falling on Judah and Jerusalem.

One of the main causes of the Babylonian captivity was the evil reign of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh (15:4), who led the nation into gross idolatry (II Kings 21:1-18). Because the people forsook God, He forsook them.

Jeremiah bemoaned the fact that he had been born "a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!" Though he had not been involved in money loans —one of the prevalent causes of dissension—every man cursed him (15:10). But he found comfort in God's word: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (15:16).

Again, as at his initial call (1:17-19), Jeremiah was warned of fierce opposition (15:20). But also again he was promised protection and deliverance.

### B. The Prophet's Celibacy (c. 16)

Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord not to take a wife (v. 2). His celibacy was to be a sign to the people of the horrors that would befall wives and children in the coming siege.

Also he was forbidden to enter the house of mourning (v. 5) or the house of feasting (v. 8). The first was a symbol that the perishing people would not be mourned. The second, of course, signified that joy and mirth would soon cease, in the Captivity.

When the people asked why they were going to be punished so severely (v. 10), the prophet was to tell them that it was because they had forsaken Jehovah to worship other gods (v. 11). Idolatry was the main cause of the Babylonian captivity. There they would have their fill of idolatry (v. 13), until they would be forever cured of it. That was the outstanding result of the Exile.

### C. The Indelibility of Judah's Sin (17:1-18)

"The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond"—thus the Lord described the indelibility of His people's sin. Because of this the doom of Judah was inevitable.

"Cursed be the man that trusteth in man," (v. 5) was another warning against foreign alliances. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord," was a call to depend on Him alone. The language of verse 8 is very closely parallel to that of Psalms 1:3.

Jeremiah had good reason to cry: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (v. 9) The only answer is: "I the Lord

search the heart" (v. 10). A man cannot even know his own heart until the Spirit of God reveals it to him.

### D. Sabbath Desecration (17:19-27)

Jeremiah was commanded to act as a sentinel at all the gates of Jerusalem to warn the people not to bear burdens on the Sabbath day. If they heeded his message, the future peace and prosperity of the city were guaranteed. If they refused to obey, the city would be destroyed by fire. The latter took place in 586 B.C.

### E. The Marred Potter's Vessel (c. 18)

In obedience to God's command the prophet went down to the potter's house. As he watched, a vessel of clay was marred in the potter's hands, but the potter remade it. Through this illustration Jeremiah received a message for his hearers: though they had been marred through disobedience, yet now by repenting they could be remade in accordance with God's plans. The same thing, of course, holds true with individuals.

Again the prophet ran into opposition. The people were saying: "Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah . . . Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words" (v. 18).

### F. The Broken Potter's Vessel (c. 19)

The prophet was commanded to get a potter's earthen vessel, take some of the elders and priests to the Valley of Hinnom, and there break the vessel before their eyes (v. 10). He was then to tell them that thus God would break Judah and Jerusalem (v. 11). Once more he predicted that the Valley of Hinnom would become the valley of slaughter (v. 6).

### G. Pashur the Priest (c. 20)

It was no new thing for the prophets to come into conflict with the priests. But Pashur, chief governor of

the house of the Lord, was especially vicious. He smote Jeremiah and put him in the stocks near the Temple (v. 2), where all the people could see his disgrace.

When Pashur set the prophet free the next day, Jeremiah had some very pointed words to say to him. He made the most definite prediction yet: "I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon" (v. 4). He asserted that Pashur and his family would be taken to Babylon and would die there.

Then comes one of the frequent autobiographical outbursts in the book (vv. 7-18). Jeremiah complains of being in derision daily, with everyone mocking him (v. 7). He decided not to speak any more in the name of the Lord, "but his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (v. 9).

Meanwhile his acquaintances were watching for a chance to trap him and take revenge on him for his preaching (v. 10). But he had the assurance that the Lord was with him "as a mighty terrible one" (v. 11). He praised the Lord (v. 13), but in the next breath cursed the day of his birth (v. 14). In this he reminds us of Job (3:1-10).

### H. The Babylonian Siege (c. 21)

This prophecy brings us down close to the end of Jeremiah's ministry. The siege of Jerusalem has already begun (v. 4).

Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, sent messengers to request Jeremiah to pray that Nebuchadnezzar would go away from Jerusalem. But the prophet answered that God would be fighting on the side of the Babylonians (vv. 4-6). He predicted that both king and people would be captured by Nebuchadnezzar (v. 7).

Then Jeremiah outlined the issue at stake: "Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death" (v. 8). The one who stayed in the city would perish by sword, famine, or pestilence. The one who gave himself up to the Babylonians would live (v. 9). For the king of Babylon was going to capture the city and burn it (v. 10). Obviously this sounded like treason.

## VII. THE LAST KINGS AND PROPHETS OF JUDAH (cc. 22—25)

### A. Kings (c. 22)

1. *Introduction* (vv. 1-9). Jeremiah was commanded to go down to the house of the king of Judah and deliver a message. It is a general exhortation to rule righteously, with the assurance that the result will be a continuation of the Davidic dynasty in power. Refusal to obey will mean the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 8-9).

2. *Jehoahaz* (vv. 10-12). The command was: "Weep ye not for the dead"; that is, for Josiah, who had been killed by Pharaoh-nechoh at Megiddo in 608 B.C. Rather, they were to weep for Jehoahaz—here called Shallum—who after a reign of only three months was taken to Egypt and died in exile there.

3. *Jehoiakim* (vv. 13-23). This king ruled eleven years. He was wicked, greedy (v. 13), proud (v. 14). His father, Josiah, had been godly (vv. 15-16). So God proclaims for him no mourning (v. 18), but the burial of an ass—no funeral (v. 19).

4. *Jehoiachin* (vv. 24-30). This king—here called Coniah—succeeded Jehoiakim but reigned only three months. Then he was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (597 B.C.). But thirty-seven years later he was released.

### B. Prophets (c. 23)

1. *Shepherds of the flock* (vv. 1-8). There is some question whether "pastors" here refers to kings or prophets. The title, as also "shepherds" (v. 4), could apply to both. Perhaps the main reason for interpreting it as meaning kings is the promise that God will raise up in the Davidic line "a righteous Branch," who will be called "The Lord Our Righteousness." Clearly the passage is Messianic.

2. *False Prophets* (vv. 9-40). Jeremiah expresses in very strong language his deep distress over the false prophets. His heart is broken, his bones shake, he is like a drunk man (v. 9).

The religious life of Judah was at a low ebb when "both prophet and priest are profane" (v. 11). The prophets of Samaria had led northern Israel into Baal worship (v. 13). The prophets of Jerusalem committed adultery, told lies, and encouraged evildoers. In God's sight they were like Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 14). They had profaned the whole land (v. 15). They were still predicting peace (v. 17). God had not sent them (v. 21). He objected to their use of the phrase "a burden of the Lord" (vv. 33-40), for that belonged only to divine messages actually given through the true prophets.

### C. Good and Bad Figs (c. 24)

After Nebuchadnezzar had carried Jehoiachin—here called Jeconiah—captive to Babylon in 597 B.C., together with the princes and skilled laborers, Jeremiah had another symbolical vision. He saw two baskets of figs, one very good and the other very bad. He was told that the good figs represented those who had already gone into captivity and would turn to God (vv. 5-7). The bad figs symbolized Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem, together with those who had already gone into Egypt (v. 8).

About these latter we know nothing definite, although it is likely that they had been taken to Egypt by Pharaoh-nechoh, along with Jehoahaz. Those symbolized by the bad figs would be scattered and destroyed (vv. 9-10).

### D. The Vision of the End (c. 25)

The "fourth year of Jehoiakim," the "first year of Nebuchadnezzar," would be 605 B.C. In that year took place the decisive battle at Carchemish, in which the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians and ended Pharaoh-nechoh's domination of Palestine. Henceforth Judah's threat was from Babylon.

Jeremiah's ministry had extended from "the thirteenth year of Josiah" (626 B.C.). The "three and twentieth year" (v. 3) would therefore—reckoning Hebrew fashion, including first and last years—be 605 B.C. The prophet reminded the people of his zealous, faithful preaching.

Again Jeremiah predicted definitely that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would destroy Judah. His most amazing prophecy, however, is that the Babylonian captivity would last "seventy years" (v. 11).

After the seventy years, God would punish the Babylonians (vv. 12-13). The land of the Chaldeans would become "perpetual desolations" (v. 12). This has been very strikingly fulfilled.

Jeremiah sees himself as taking the wine cup of God's wrath and causing all the nations to drink of it (vv. 15-28). These included Judah (v. 18) and all the surrounding nations here listed at length. After God finished punishing His own city Jerusalem, He would punish the other nations also (v. 29).

The expression "The Lord shall roar from on high" is closely parallel to the opening words of the prophecy of Amos (1:2), who had prophesied a century and a half earlier in north Israel.

This section closes with a lamentation over the coming fall of Jerusalem. The end was already in sight.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Where and when did Jeremiah prophesy?
2. Why is he called "the weeping prophet"?
3. What was the main burden of Jeremiah's ministry?
4. Why is chapter 5 called the "Diogenes Chapter?"
5. What was the outstanding sin of Judah in Jeremiah's day?
6. Discuss the lessons of the marred girdle, the marred potter's vessel, the broken potter's vessel, and the good and bad figs.

Chapter Four

# THE PROPHET OF DOOM

Jeremiah 26—52
Lamentations 1—5

## I. PERSONAL LIFE OF THE PROPHET (cc. 26—45)

The first twenty-five chapters—roughly the first half—of the Book of Jeremiah consist of prophecies against Judah. The second half of the book is taken up largely with historical narratives, the main exception being the section devoted to prophecies against foreign nations (cc. 46—51).

### A. Priests and Prophets vs. Princes and People (c. 26)

This prophecy is dated (v. 1) at the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign (*ca.* 608 B.C.). Jeremiah was commanded to stand in the house of the Lord and warn the worshipers that if they did not turn from their evil ways the Temple at Jerusalem would suffer the same fate as the Tabernacle at Shiloh (v. 6). The latter had been the central place of worship during the days of the judges. Archaeology has discovered that Shiloh was destroyed by fire about the middle of the eleventh century B.C., thus confirming the picture presented in First Samuel and also Jeremiah's reference to it as being in ruins in his day.[1]

The prophet's declaration that Jerusalem would be destroyed (v. 6) was considered an act of treason, for which he must die (v. 8). This provoked a popular uprising (v. 9).

The king's house (v. 10) was just south of the Temple area. Hearing the uproar the princes soon appeared in the Temple and an informal court session was convened

immediately. The priests and prophets acted as prosecuting attorneys, calling for the death sentence (v. 11). The princes and the people constituted the judge and jury. The defendant's only plea was that God had commanded him to utter the prophecy (v. 12). In his defense he inserted a plea for repentance (v. 13).

In this case Jeremiah was more fortunate than at some other times. The princes and the people rejected the accusation of the priests and prophets and rendered a verdict of not guilty (v. 16).

### B. Babylonian Supremacy (cc. 27—29)

1. *Submission to Babylon* (c. 27). The first verse of this chapter carries the same date as the beginning of the previous chapter—"in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim." But verses 3 and 12, together with 28:1, show that Zedekiah is meant. Young, the leading conservative Old Testament scholar today, says: "Evidently the word 'Jehoiakim' in v. 1 is a scribal error for 'Zedekiah.' "[2] With this Cawley agrees when he writes: "It is almost certainly a scribal error."[3]

Jeremiah was commanded to make bonds and bars to be worn on his neck (v. 2) and then send them to the kings of Edom, Moab, and Ammon—all east of Palestine —and to the kings of Tyre and Sidon (north). With them was to go the message that these kings were to submit to Nebuchadnezzar's rule. The nation that would not be in subjection would suffer punishment (v. 8), while those who did submit would be allowed to remain in their own lands. Babylon was God's ordained power for this period (v. 6), and peace would come only by submission to its rule.

The same message was given specifically to Zedekiah, the king of Judah (vv. 12-15). This emphasis is repeated several times in the book.

The false prophets were telling the people that the vessels of the Temple which had been taken to Babylon would soon be returned (v. 16). Jeremiah threw out this challenge: if the false prophets were right let them prevent the remaining Temple furnishings from being carried to Babylon (v. 18). But the facts were that these would soon be taken by Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 19-22).

2. *Jeremiah vs. Hananiah* (c. 28). "In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah" (*ca.* 598 B.C)—evidently the same time as chapter 27—Hananiah, a false prophet, challenged Jeremiah's position. He quoted God as declaring: "I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the Lord's house" (vv. 2-3). He also predicted that Jeconiah (Jehoiachin), who had been taken captive after a three months' reign (597 B.C.), together with the other captives in Babylon, would be returned to Judah (v. 4).

Hananiah then proceeded to break the wooden yoke on Jeremiah's neck (v. 10), declaring that thus would God, within two years, break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar on all the nations (v. 11). Jeremiah replied that God would put a yoke of iron on the necks of these nations and compel them to serve Nebuchadnezzar (v. 14). He also predicted the death of Hananiah that very year. When this took place the people should have recognized that Jeremiah was speaking truly for God.

3. *A Message to the Captives* (c. 29). The prophet sent a letter to the people of Judah who had been taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. He told them to build houses, plant gardens, marry, and settle down (vv. 5-7). Their prophets who told them they would soon return to Judah were deceiving them (vv. 8-9). Again (cf. 25:11) Jeremiah predicted that the Babylonian captivity would last seventy years (v. 10). Peace and restoration would then come (vv. 11-14).

Two of the false prophets in Babylon are named—Ahab (v. 21) and Shemaiah (v. 24). The latter had gone so far as to send letters from Babylon to Jerusalem, urging the priests to silence Jeremiah because he had advised the captives to accept their position as of long duration (vv. 27-28).

### C. Sunrise at Midnight (cc. 30—33)

This is the only long section of the Book of Jeremiah that is filled with messages of hope and comfort and future glory. It rises like a mountain peak above the mists of gloom and judgment on the surrounding lowlands.

The thirty-second chapter is dated "in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah," and it is thought that this whole section belongs to that time. This was just one year before Jerusalem fell in 587 or 586 B.C.

So these chapters were written in the midnight of Judah's history. The prophet was in prison, the king was sealing the nation's doom with his disobedience, the executioner's ax was about to fall. But in this darkest hour the light shines most brightly in Jeremiah's writings as he glimpses a glorious future.

1. *Jacob Shall Return* (cc. 30—31). Here we find the first reference to writing in Jeremiah. The prophet is commanded: "Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book" (30:2). The purpose is that when the people return from captivity they may have a proof that God had spoken truly through His prophet (v. 3).

The keynote of this section is found in 30:10—"Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet,

and none shall make him afraid." This thought is repeated again and again in these two chapters.

The most striking passage in this section is that which describes the "new covenant" (31:31-34). This is quoted in full in Hebrews 8:8-12. It is one of the most significant Old Testament predictions of the spiritual nature of Christianity as compared with Judaism. Instead of God's law being written on tablets of stone, it will be written in human hearts. Verse 33 is a graphic description of the experience of entire sanctification.

2. *Faith Is Costly* (cc. 32—33). The year before Jerusalem was captured Jeremiah received a challenging order from the Lord. The city was surrounded by the Babylonian army. The prophet had been shut up in prison by the king for predicting that Jerusalem would be taken and Zedekiah led into captivity.

It was only a few minutes before midnight, and there was no glimmer of dawn. Yet in this dark hour Jeremiah was commanded to do an apparently preposterous thing. He was to buy from his cousin Hanameel a field in Anathoth which was probably right then in the possession of the enemy. With the prospect of Babylonian victory in the near offing, the commercial value of the property was nil. Yet Jeremiah paid a good price for the field (32:9). Two deeds were drawn up, one "sealed" and the other "open" (v. 11). Both were to be placed by Baruch in "an earthen vessel," where they would be safely kept for many years (v. 14). This custom of storing treasured manuscripts in pottery jars has received great publicity in the recent startling discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Why did Jeremiah purchase the field? It was to be concrete evidence of his faith in his own divinely inspired predictions of the return from captivity (v. 15). If he really believed the people would be restored to their land,

he must prove it by paying cash for property that was now worthless.

Nowhere else does Jeremiah's characteristic humanity show more clearly than in his reactions after closing the deal. In desperate faith he prays, "There is nothing too hard for thee" (v. 17), but at the same time he reminds the Lord of the siege that is soon to end in the destruction of the city (v. 24).

The answer was not long in coming. Jehovah echoed Jeremiah's question: "Is there anything too hard for me?" (v. 27) He then reiterated the prediction that Jerusalem would be destroyed (vv. 28-29). The reason for this was the idolatry of the people of Judah (vv. 29-35).

But then the Lord comforted the prophet's heart by assuring him that the captives would be restored to Judah and fields would again be bought for money (vv. 36-44). The property which Jeremiah had purchased would once more be valuable.

Chapter 33 contains a second message to Jeremiah while he was still shut up in prison (v. 1). It is filled with fresh assurances of the return from captivity and glowing descriptions of the future glory of the nation. To strengthen the prophet's faith the Lord said: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (v. 3).

A Messianic prophecy occurs here: "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land" (v. 15). Only in a very limited way was this fulfilled in connection with the return from captivity. The complete "filling full" awaited the coming of David's Son, the Messiah. In fact, this passage looks forward to the Second Coming for its final fulfillment.

The thirty-third chapter closes with the reiterated assurance that God's covenant with Israel will not be

broken (vv. 19-26). Again it must be stated that only in Christ has the Davidic covenant been confirmed.

### D. Broken Covenants (c. 34)

1. *A Message to Zedekiah* (vv. 1-5). While the siege was going on, Jeremiah was instructed to tell the king again that Jerusalem would be destroyed by fire and that Zedekiah would be taken captive to Babylon. But assurance was given that he would die there in peace (v. 5).

2. *A Breach of Faith* (vv. 6-22). During the siege the frightened slaveowners of Jerusalem had made a covenant to release all their Hebrew slaves, whom they had held contrary to the Mosaic law. At Sinai, God had made a covenant with His people that every fellow Israelite would be released in the sabbatical year (v. 14). But they had been breaking that covenant. Now, to add to their sin, they broke the vow they made in the siege, and re-enslaved their servants whom they had freed (v. 16). God said He would proclaim for these sinners a "liberty" to sword, pestilence, and famine (v. 17).

### E. The Rechabites (c. 35)

One of the strangest characteristics of the Book of Jeremiah is the lack of chronological order. Many of the prophecies are dated, but they are not placed in a sequence of time. Chapters 27—34 have their historical setting in the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. In chapter 35 we return to the time of Jehoiakim (cf. c. 26), the third to last king.

Jeremiah took the Rechabites into the Temple and offered them wine to drink. They refused, saying that they had never disobeyed the command of their ancestor to refrain from drinking wine, as well as to avoid living in houses and engaging in agriculture (vv. 6-10). They

were to follow permanently the vocation of shepherds, dwelling in tents.

The message of the Lord through Jeremiah was this: If the Rechabites had been true to the commands of an earthly ancestor, why could not Judah be true to God's covenant? The Rechabites had set an example that shamed the Israelites.

### F. The First and Second Editions of Jeremiah (c. 36)

This chapter is well-nigh unique in the Old Testament in letting us catch a glimpse of the literary history of one of its books. The evidence is clear that the Book of Jeremiah came out in at least four editions, and perhaps more. In this chapter we are told of two. The last sentence of chapter 51 indicates a completion of Jeremiah's words. The final edition included the historical appendix in chapter 52. These phenomena may help to explain why the Septuagint text of Jeremiah is only seven-eighths as long as the Massoretic Hebrew text.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim (*ca.* 605 B.C.) the prophet was commanded by the Lord to write his prophecies on a scroll. So he called his scribe, Baruch, and dictated the messages to him (v. 4). Since Jeremiah was confined in prison, he asked Baruch to read the scroll on a fast day, when the crowds would be gathered in the Temple. The next year (v. 9)—time moves slowly in the Orient!—Baruch read from the scroll to the people. Called before the princes, he read it to them (v. 15). Finally the king was informed, and the roll was read to him (v. 21). (These three readings, apparently in one day, indicate that the scroll was not very long.)

Jehoiakim's attitude toward God's word is shown in startling form. As fast as a column of the scroll was read he cut it off with his penknife and contemptuously threw it into the fire. (The fact that the scroll was burned shows that it was probably of papyrus.)

The sequel is told in verse 32: "Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe . . . ; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words." This is the second, enlarged edition of Jeremiah. It covered the first half of the prophet's ministry (*ca.* 626-604 B.C.).

G. A Prophet in Prison (cc. 37—38)

1. *Answering the King* (37:1-10). During the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians there occurred a brief respite that raised unduly the hopes of the people inside the city. The Egyptian army entered Palestine, and the Chaldeans (Babylonians) withdrew for a time from Jerusalem (37:5). But Jeremiah warned the king that the Babylonians would return without fail and would burn the city with fire (37:8).

2. *Accused of Treason* (37:11-15). When the siege was lifted temporarily Jeremiah started out the Benjamin gate to inspect his new property in Anathoth, some three miles away "in the land of Benjamin" (v. 12). But he was arrested, accused of deserting to the Chaldeans, beaten, and thrown into prison.

3. *Appealing to the King* (37:16-21). King Zedekiah is a pathetic example of a vacillating character. Secretly he brought Jeremiah from prison and asked, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (v. 17) In reply the prophet repeated his prediction that the king would be taken captive. Then he pleaded with Zedekiah not to send him back to the dungeon, where he was apt to die. So the prophet was placed in the court of the guard and given a loaf a day. (It should be remembered that a loaf then was the size of a biscuit today.)

4. *Threatened with Death* (38:1-6). When some of the leaders heard Jeremiah openly urging surrender to

the Babylonians, they begged the king to execute him for treason. Zedekiah's reply was very typical of the man: "Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you" (v. 5). A nation is in a sorry plight indeed when it is ruled by a king with no conscience and a weak will.

5. *Rescued by an Ethiopian* (38:7-13). The prophet had one friend at the palace, "Ebed-melech the Ethiopian." This African servant secured the king's permission to remove Jeremiah from the miry dungeon. Tenderly he provided rags for cushions under his arms, so that the aging prophet would not be hurt with the ropes as they slowly pulled him out of the mud. Millions of readers have praised the kindness of this obscure servant.

6. *Counseling the King* (38:14-28). Once more the weak-willed Zedekiah took Jeremiah into secret conference. After the king had sworn not to harm him, the prophet declared God's message boldly. It was the same thing he had advised before: surrender to the Babylonians. A terrific responsibility was laid on the king when Jeremiah informed him that if he surrendered the city would be spared; if not, it would be destroyed. The fate of Jerusalem lay in the decision of one man. What a tragedy that that man was Zedekiah!

True to his character the king said, "I am afraid" (v. 19). Jeremiah again warned him that, if he failed to obey, "thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire" (v. 23). The king was a coward and the city was destroyed. Zedekiah will always bear the blame for this.

### H. The Fall of Jerusalem (c. 39)

1. *The End of the Siege* (vv. 1-3). Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign. In the fourth month of the eleventh year (587 or 586 B.C.) the Babylonians broke through the walls. The siege had lasted a year and a half.

2. *The Capture of the King* (vv. 4-10). Zedekiah tried to flee by night, heading for the Jordan valley. But in the plains of Jericho he was caught. The last sight he ever saw was the execution of his two sons. Then with that vision stamped vividly on his memory his eyes were gouged out. What a price to pay for a weak-willed vacillation!

3. *The Care of Jeremiah* (vv. 11-14). Evidently Nebuchadnezzar was acquainted with Jeremiah's preaching. Doubtless also his censors had read the letters the prophet sent to the captives in Babylon. So he ordered the captain of the guard to treat Jeremiah with generous care.

4. *Ebed-melech's Reward* (vv. 15-18). No act of kindness goes unrewarded. Because the Ethiopian trusted God and rescued the prophet he was promised his liberty.

### I. The Aftermath (cc. 40—43)

The sequel to the fall of Jerusalem is a sad story of murder, intrigue, deception, and disobedience. These four chapters give a record of what took place.

1. *The New Governor* (c. 40). When Jeremiah had been given his complete freedom and showered with food and money (v. 5), he went to the newly appointed governor, Gedaliah, at Mizpeh (v. 6), probably eight miles north of Jerusalem. The governor advised the people to submit peaceably to Babylonian rule (v. 9). The Jews who had fled east of the Jordan returned to their old homes (vv. 11-12).

The governor was warned that Ishmael was planning to assassinate him, on orders from the king of Ammon. But Gedaliah refused to believe such a thing (vv. 13-16).

2. *The Wicked Assassin* (c. 41). Because the governor rejected the warning he lost his life (vv. 1-3). Ishmael, the assassin, was not content until he had killed

men from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria who came to bring offerings to the house of the Lord. The depth of his deception is described in verses 4-7. Finally he was routed and escaped to Ammon (vv. 11-15).

3. *The Deceitful Remnant* (cc. 42—43). Johanan, the new leader of the Jews who were left, came with his followers to Jeremiah to ask advice. They bound themselves under oath to obey whatever directions the Lord gave through His prophet (42:5-6).

The orders from heaven were very definite: Stay in this land; do not be afraid of the king of Babylon; I will protect you (vv. 10-12). Furthermore, the prophet warned the people that if they disobeyed God's orders and fled to Egypt they would suffer for it (vv. 13-17). The sword they had feared would follow them there.

The prophet pleaded with the people: "O remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt" (v. 19). He then went on to charge them with deceitfulness and insincerity when they asked divine guidance (vv. 20-21).

That the prophet was right was proved by the sequel (43:1-7). The people accused Jeremiah of speaking falsely (v. 2) and of being influenced by Baruch to give advice that would result in their punishment by the Chaldeans (v. 3). Defiantly they migrated to Egypt, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them (vv. 5-8).

In Egypt, Jeremiah predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer that country and destroy its gods (43: 8-13). This was fulfilled in 568 B.C.

### J. The Jews in Egypt (c. 44)

In view of the destruction of Jerusalem as a punishment for the idolatry of the Israelites, it is extremely difficult to understand the attitude of the Jews in Egypt. They plunged still more deeply into idolatry. They were burning incense to the gods of Egypt (v. 8). So Jeremiah predicted the destruction of the remnant (v. 12).

The defiance of the Jews toward God and His prophet is described in the harsh language of verse 16. They reasoned that when they burned incense to the queen of heaven (Ishtar) they were better off materially (v. 17). But the prophet told them it was their idolatry that brought on the Captivity. This is apparently Jeremiah's last message.

### K. Baruch, the Biographer (c. 45)

Baruch acted as Jeremiah's scribe, as is indicated in a number of places in the book. But it would appear that he also wrote some of the historical sections of the book, especially the biographical descriptions of Jeremiah in the third person. So it is probably not out of place to call Baruch Jeremiah's Boswell. We owe a great deal to this faithful servant of the prophet.

## II. PROPHECIES CONCERNING FOREIGN NATIONS (cc. 46—51)

The collection of prophecies against foreign nations comes in the early part of Isaiah (cc. 13—23) but at the end of Jeremiah. In Ezekiel it comes at about the middle of the book (cc. 25—32), as it does in the Septuagint of Jeremiah.

### A. Egypt (c. 46)

1. *Pharaoh-nechoh's Defeat* (vv. 1-12). The Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.) was one of the turning points of ancient history. Here the proud and ambitious Pharaoh-nechoh of Egypt was completely humbled, while Nebuchadnezzar took over as the dominant power in western Asia. Though Egypt rose up "like the Nile" (vv. 7-8) with swelling pride, she fell "by the river Euphrates" (vv. 6, 10). Jeremiah's description of the battle is worthy of an eloquent Isaiah.

2. *Nebuchadnezzar's Conquest* (vv. 13-26). The prophet went on to describe the coming conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar. Egypt gloried in her gods. But these had been humbled once by Jehovah through Moses and would be again through Nebuchadnezzar. The chapter closes with words of comfort for God's people (vv. 27-28). These look beyond the Captivity to the restoration.

### B. Philistia (c. 47)

The prophecy is dated "before that Pharaoh smote Gaza" (v. 1). But it describes the conquest of the Philistines by Nebuchadnezzar.

### C. Moab (c. 48)

Moab lay east of the Dead Sea. This country gloried in its avoidance of conquest and captivity (v. 11). But it is to suffer for its sins (v. 26).

### D. Ammon (49:1-6)

Ammon was located northeast of Moab, with its capital, Rabbah, (v. 2) at what is now Amman (capital of Jordan). It was to be punished for oppressing the Israelites.

### E. Edom (49:7-22)

This country was south of the Dead Sea. Noted for its wisdom (v. 7), it was yet to be destroyed.

### F. Damascus (49:23-27)

This ancient capital of Syria, now the oldest city in the world, was likewise to be captured.

### G. Kedar (49:28-33)

Kedar was an Ishmaelite tribe of nomadic shepherds, proud and independent. It too would be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar.

### H. Elam (49:34-39)

This country was east of the Tigris-Euphrates valley. Its power was to be broken, but would ultimately be restored.

### I. Babylon (cc. 50—51)

In both Isaiah and Jeremiah, Babylon receives the longest treatment. Its importance in history and the pride of its power is shown in its use in Revelation as a symbolical name for the forces against Christianity.

The utter destruction of Babylon (51:54-58) is well attested by archaeology. The prophet commanded his prophecy against Babylon to be cast into the Euphrates as a sign that the city would sink, never to rise again (51:59-64).

## III. HISTORICAL APPENDIX (c. 52)

The closing statement of chapter 51, "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah," would seem to indicate clearly that chapter 52 is an appendix added by someone else. It is closely paralleled in II Kings 24:18—25:21.

The rebellion of Zedekiah against Babylon was considered a serious breach of faith. His sad fate is described in somewhat more detail (vv. 4-11) as is also the destruction of the city (vv. 12-14). The treasures of the Temple that were taken to Babylon are enumerated (vv. 17-23). The number of captives is given as 4,600 (vv. 28-30). The book closes with an account of how Evil-merodach, the successor of Nebuchadnezzar, freed Jehoiachin and treated him kindly (vv. 31-34).

## IV. THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH (cc. 1—5)

This book, which is traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah, contains five elegies, or funeral dirges. The form of these five poems is of special interest. The first four are alpha-

betic, or acrostic. In the first two chapters each verse begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet and has three parts. In the third chapter there are three verses for each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The fourth chapter has two lines in each verse, and each succeeding verse begins with a new letter in alphabetical order. While the fifth chapter has twenty-two verses, they are not alphabetic. A special elegiac meter, called *qinah,* is used to express deep grief, giving a melancholy tone to the reading.

Apparently these funeral dirges were written to bewail the death of the Kingdom of Judah. The closing chapter is a prayer for the restoration of the nation from captivity.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What two groups opposed Jeremiah and what two defended him?
2. What foreign policy did Jeremiah advocate?
3. What advice did he give the captives?
4. What happened to the first edition of the book of Jeremiah?
5. Discuss Jeremiah's relations with Zedekiah.
6. What happened to the prophet after the fall of Jerusalem?
7. What is the nature of Lamentations?

CHAPTER FIVE

## THE CAPTIVE PROPHET
Ezekiel

*Name:* means "God strengthens"

*Home:* Jerusalem

*Date of ministry:* 593-571 B.C.

*Place of ministry:* Babylonia

*Outline of book:*

I. Prophecies Before the Fall of Jerusalem (cc. 1—24)

II. Prophecies Against Foreign Nations (cc. 25—32)

III. Prophecies After the Fall of Jerusalem (cc. 33—48)

*Verses to memorize:* 11:9, 20; 33:11; 36:25-27

### INTRODUCTION

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was priest (1:3) as well as prophet. Unlike Jeremiah he spent the days of his ministry in a foreign land.

Taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C., he lived by the river (or canal) Chebar in Babylonia. There he ministered to the captives from Judah. Until the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.) he addressed messages to the people back home. That event marks the dividing line in his ministry.

While Isaiah and Jeremiah each prophesied for forty years, Ezekiel's ministry lasted twenty-two years. The beginning date, 593 B.C., is indicated in 1:2. The last dated prophecy (29:17) was in 571 B.C.

Ezekiel is unique among the three prophets in his employment of apocalyptic imagery. He also makes more use of symbolical acts to illustrate his messages than the

other two, although we have seen that Jeremiah has several instances of that. Taken altogether, Ezekiel is somewhat more difficult to understand and less widely read than Isaiah and Jeremiah. Especially is that true of the last section of the book.

## I. THE PROPHET'S CALL (cc. 1—3)

### A. The Heading (1:1-3)

Ezekiel began his ministry "in the thirtieth year." It is rather generally agreed that this means the thirtieth year of Ezekiel's life. The Levites were not supposed to begin their public ministry until they were thirty years of age (Numbers 4:3). So this was a logical time for Ezekiel to commence his prophetic ministry.

The "river Chebar" is usually identified as an irrigation canal south of Babylon. Here "the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God" (v. 1). This is characteristic of the Book of Ezekiel, which gives prominent place to apocalyptic visions.

The beginning of Ezekiel's ministry is dated definitely in "the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity" (v. 2). Since that ruler was taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. the fifth year would be 593 B.C.

### B. The Vision of the Glory of God (1:4-28)

Isaiah's call was connected with a vision of the holiness of God (Isaiah 6). Ezekiel's came in a vision of the glory of God. Jeremiah, on the other hand, seems to have felt a growing conviction of a divine call.

The setting of Ezekiel's call seems to have been a violent "stormy wind." The language of verse 4 finds a striking parallel in the following account of a storm on the Euphrates:

> Dense masses of black clouds, streaked with orange, red and yellow appeared coming up from the WSW, and approaching us with a

> fearful velocity . . . The clouds by this time were quite terrific. Below the darkest of them there was a large collection of matter, of a dark crimson colour, which was rolling towards us at an awful rate . . . All became calm and clear as before, and barely twenty-five minutes had seen the beginning progress and termination of this fearful hurricane.[1]

It is noticeable that Ezekiel uses the word "likeness" over and over again (vv. 5, 10, 13, 22, etc.). The prophet seeks to describe the indescribable with familiar figures; so all he can do is to say that what he saw was "like" something else. It should be perfectly obvious that Ezekiel never intended for his readers to take his language literally. It is symbolical language and should be treated as such.

### C. The Call and Commission (cc. 2—3)

1. *The Call* (2:1—3:3). The prophet is addressed frequently as "Son of man" (2:1, 3, 6, 8, etc.). This title "emphasizes his status as a mere creature over against the majesty of the Creator."[2]

Note that "Spirit" is capitalized in the American Standard and Revised Standard versions (not in the King James). It was the Holy Spirit who entered him at his call (2:2).

Ezekiel was warned that he was being sent to a rebellious people (2:3), as were Isaiah and Jeremiah. It was not a pleasant task to be a true prophet in Israel. But whether the people heeded or rejected his message, the prophet was to give it faithfully (2:5-7).

The prophet was then commanded to take a scroll that was handed him (2:9). It was apparently a papyrus scroll, written on both the recto and verso sides; that is, with the grain and across it (2:10). Following the instructions to eat the scroll, the prophet found it sweet to his taste. This symbolized the fact that a minister

must feed his own soul on the Word of God before he can preach it to others.

2. *The Commission* (3:4-27). The prophet's commission was to give God's message to "the house of Israel." Again he was warned that the people would not listen to him because they had refused to listen to God (v. 7). Specifically, he was commissioned to preach to the captives in Babylonia (v. 11).

The Spirit (small *s* again in K.J.V.) lifted the prophet and carried him (vv. 12, 14) to the captives at Tel-abib (cf. Tel Aviv, name of large city in Israel today), on the Chebar canal. There he "sat overwhelmed among them seven days" (v. 15, A.R.V.).

Then came an important phase of his commission. God said: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" (v. 17). If he failed to warn the wicked, "his blood will I require at thy hand" (v. 18). But if he gave the warning and it went unheeded, "thou hast delivered thy soul" (v. 19). These words are weighty ones for every preacher to consider.

Twice again we find "the glory of the Lord" (v. 12, 23). This might well be considered a key phrase of the Book of Ezekiel, which begins with several visions of the glory of the Lord and ends with a telescopic view of future glory.

## II. FOUR SYMBOLICAL ACTS (cc. 4—5)

Ezekiel was a dramatic preacher, if there ever was one. In this section we find four symbolical acts with their interpretation.

### A. The Siege of Jerusalem (4:1-3)

The prophet was commanded to take clay and draw on it a representation of Jerusalem, with siege weapons

placed against it. This was to symbolize the coming siege of Jerusalem (587-586 B.C.).

B. The Exile (4:4-8)

The prophet was to lie on his left side 390 days (190 in LXX) bearing the sins of Israel, and 40 days bearing the sins of Judah. These would symbolize the captivities of the two kingdoms, Israel's beginning earlier (722 B.C.).

C. The Famine (4:9-17)

Ezekiel was to measure very carefully the small amounts of food and drink which he could take during this period. So Jerusalem would be afflicted with famine during the siege (cf. Jeremiah 52:6).

D. The Destruction of Life (5:1-4)

The prophet was to shave the hair of his head and beard. One-third of it, by weight, he was to burn, one-third to smite with the sword, and one-third to scatter to the winds.

E. The Significance of the Symbols (5:5-17)

All these symbolical acts had reference to Jerusalem (v. 5). Specifically, the hair burned typified those who would die of pestilence and famine during the siege, the second part of hair those destroyed by the sword, and the third part those scattered into exile (v. 12).

## III. THE DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL (cc. 6—7)

A. The Mountains of Israel (c. 6)

Ezekiel was commanded to set his face against the mountains of Israel and prophesy to them (v. 2). His message was one of judgment and destruction. To emphasize his preaching he was instructed: "Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot" (v. 11). Ezekiel was an energetic speaker.

Archaeology has thrown interesting light on a word used twice in this chapter (vv. 5-6). In the King James Version it was translated "images." In the American Standard Version it was rendered "sun-images." But these were only guesses. The actual meaning of the Hebrew *hammanim* was not known until recently, when a small altar was dug up with this word (in the singular) inscribed on it. So for the first time this Hebrew word is correctly translated in the Revised Standard Version "incense altars."

### B. Israel's Doom (c. 7)

The prophet cries out: "An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land" (v. 1). In strongest language he portrays the imminence of the nation's doom: "Thus saith the Lord God; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. An end is come, the end is come" (vv. 5-6). Again he cries: "Behold the day, behold, it is come" (v. 10). It is the day of the Lord, the day of judgment, the day of doom and destruction. And it is near!

## IV. THE SIN AND FATE OF JERUSALEM (cc. 8—11)

### A. Idolatry in the Temple (c. 8)

This prophecy was uttered "in the sixth year" of the Captivity (592 B.C.), "in the sixth month" (August-September). As Ezekiel was sitting in his house, and elders of Judah with him, he had another vision. He saw "a likeness as the appearance of fire" (v. 2). This seems to be the nearest he ever had of a vision of God. A hand took him by the hair and the Spirit transported him in vision to Jerusalem (v. 3). There—in a spiritual vision, not physically—he saw what was going on in the Temple.

North of the altar he saw the "image of jealousy" (v. 5); that is, an idolatrous representation which pro-

voked God to jealousy. In a secret inner room, reached by a hidden entrance, he discovered seventy elders of Israel offering incense before idolatrous figures portrayed on the wall. Then at the north gate of the Lord's house he saw women weeping for Tammuz, the Babylonian god of vegetation. Worse still, between the porch and the altar he found about twenty-five men, "with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshiped the sun toward the east" (v. 16). In the very place where the priests were supposed to offer prayer (Joel 2:17), facing the altar, these men, with their backs toward God's house, were worshiping the sun.

### B. The Judgment of Jerusalem (c. 9)

The prophet saw six executioners enter the city. In their midst was a man dressed in linen, with writing materials. He was to mark all those who sorrowed over the sins of the people. The rest of the city's inhabitants were to be slain (v. 5). Then comes this significant addition: "And begin at my sanctuary."

### C. The Glory of the Lord Departs (c. 10)

Again Ezekiel had a highly symbolical vision of the glory of the Lord, until the whole court was full of it (v. 4). But finally he saw the glory accompany the cherubs as they departed from the Temple by the east gate (vv. 18-19). This vision enforced the fact that the Shekinah of God's presence was forsaking His house because of the people's sin.

### D. Judgment on the Princes (11:1-13)

At the east gate of the Temple the prophet saw twenty-five men who had conspired together to defy God's law. When Ezekiel prophesied their destruction Pelatiah, a prince, dropped dead.

### E. Future Restoration (11:14-25)

Even in the Captivity, God promises to be "a sanctuary for a little while in the countries where they are come" (v. 16, A.R.V.). The spiritual nature of the religion of the future is suggested thus: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh" (v. 19).

In the previous chapter the glory of the Lord had left the Temple. But now (v. 23) it departed entirely from the city. Ezekiel, in the Spirit, returned to Babylon and reported to the captives what he had seen in the vision (vv. 24-25).

## V. THE NECESSITY OF THE CAPTIVITY (cc. 12—19)

### A. The Imminence of It (c. 12)

1. *The Prophet's Symbolical Moving* (vv. 1-16). Ezekiel was commanded to perform another symbolical act. He was to move his household goods in the sight of the people. This was a sign that the final captivity of Judah would soon take place. Its prince would be brought to Babylon; "yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there" (v. 13). This strange prediction was fulfilled in the case of Zedekiah, whose eyes were put out before he was taken captive to Babylon.

2. *The Famine* (vv. 17-20). The prophet was to eat his bread with quaking and drink his water with trembling (v. 18) as a sign of the terrible calamities of the siege of Jerusalem. This is rather similar to 4:16-17.

3. *No More Delay* (vv. 21-28). The people were saying that the time was prolonged and every vision failed (v. 22). But God declared that the prophecies of Jeru-

salem's destruction would be fulfilled in that generation; they would not be deferred any longer (vv. 25, 28).

### B. False Prophets (cc. 13—14)

1. *False Hopes* (13:1-7). The false prophets, as in Jeremiah, were marked by a baseless optimism. They raised the hopes of the people by saying that the divine prophecies of judgment would not be fulfilled (v. 6).

2. *Whitewash* (13:8-16). The Lord accuses the false prophets of daubing "whitewash" (v. 10, R.S.V.) on the walls. Certainly some modern preaching simply whitewashes sin. But God says He will knock down the whitewashed wall, so that its real nature can be seen (v. 14).

3. *Women Prophets* (13:17-23). These come in for special condemnation. The "pillows" ("magic bands," R.S.V.) they sewed on people's wrists (v. 18) were supposed to have magic power. These women are accused of hunting souls (vv. 18, 20).

4. *Insincere Inquirers* (14:1-11). Some elders of Israel visited Ezekiel. But he was told by the Lord that they were practicing idolatry (vv. 3, 6). God pronounced special judgments on those who continued in idolatry.

5. *Inevitable Judgment* (14:12-23). The presence of a few righteous will not save the many wicked from destruction. Though "Noah, Daniel, and Job" (v. 14) were living in Judah they would save only their own souls. Probably Daniel here is an ancient patriarch, not the contemporary of Ezekiel.

### C. A Parable of the Vine (c. 15)

Just as a worthless vine will be cast into the fire and burned, so the people of Jerusalem must be punished for their sin. The fact that they considered themselves God's chosen vine (cf. Isaiah 4) would not save them.

### D. A Faithless Wife (c. 16)

In a rather lengthy allegory Ezekiel portrays the history of Israel. The very frank, picturesque language is typical of an Oriental storyteller.

1. *The Forsaken Foundling* (vv. 1-5). The prophet first pictures Israel as a baby girl, unwanted, and so exposed to die—a very common custom in the Orient.

2. *The Married Maiden* (vv. 6-14). Jehovah discovered the helpless infant and cared for her. Then he finally took her to be his wife, decking her with all the finery of an elaborate Oriental wedding.

3. *The Wayward Wife* (vv. 15-34). In spite of all that Jehovah had done for her, Israel was unfaithful to her husband. Incessantly she played the harlot with heathen gods and foreign nations—the Egyptians to the south (v. 26), the Assyrians to the north (v. 28), and finally the Babylonians (v. 29). She is condemned as "a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!" (v. 32)

4. *The Resultant Rejection* (v. 35-52). Because Israel had forsaken the Lord, he would reject her as His wife and turn her over to her lovers, whom she had chosen (v. 37). They would treat her with contempt and harsh cruelty (vv. 39-41). This was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

God goes so far as to say that Judah was worse than her older sister Samaria (vv. 46, 51) and her younger sister Sodom (vv. 46, 48). This was because she had greater privilege. The greater one's light, the worse one's punishment.

5. *The Future Forgiveness* (vv. 53-63). In spite of the stubborn willfulness of His wayward wife, Jehovah promises to forgive and restore her. It was the same message that Hosea had proclaimed nearly two centuries earlier.

### E. The Vultures and the Vine (c. 17)

1. *The Parable* (vv. 1-10). Ezekiel was fond of allegories, as this and the previous chapter indicate. The "great eagle" (v. 3), or vulture, is Nebuchadnezzar. "The highest branch of the cedar" (v. 3) refers to Jehoiachin, and "the top of his young twigs" (v. 4) to his princes. These were taken captive to Babylon in 597 B.C. "The seed" planted (v. 5) was Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar then placed on the throne of Judah. The other great eagle (v. 7) is Pharaoh-hophra, whose help Zedekiah sought in his rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 44:30).

2. *The Interpretation* (vv. 11-21). Zedekiah had sworn allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar (v. 13). But now he was rebelling against him and seeking aid from Egypt (v. 15). The result would be Zedekiah's captivity in Babylon (v. 20), because he had broken his covenant (v. 16).

3. *Another Allegory* (vv. 22-24). The chapter closes with a brief Messianic prophecy. The tender twig (v. 22) is the King of David's line who will finally rule.

### F. Retribution and Responsibility (c. 18)

This is one of the most significant chapters of Ezekiel because of its teaching on individual responsibility. This was needed to balance the idea of national guilt.

In circulation was a popular proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (v. 2). The generation that had gone into captivity was complaining that it was suffering unjustly for the sins of previous generations. The Lord's answer was: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (v. 20). This sums up the teaching of the entire chapter. When the son of a righteous man (vv. 5-9) becomes wicked (vv. 10-13), he will suffer for his own sins (v. 13). On the other

hand, if the son of this wicked man is righteous (vv. 14-17), he will live. Thus God defends himself against the charge: "The way of the Lord is not equal" (vv. 25, 29).

### G. Lamentations of Ezekiel (c. 19)

The prophet was commanded to take up a lamentation, or funeral dirge, for the princes of Israel (v. 1). It is given in the form of two allegorical poems.

1. *Allegory of the Lions* (vv. 2-9). The princes are first portrayed as lions. The mother lioness is Judah. The first young lion (v. 3) is Jehoahaz, who was taken captive to Egypt by Pharaoh-nechoh in 608 B.C. The second young lion (v. 5) is Jehoiachin—some say Zedekiah—who was taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. Both of these kings reigned only three months apiece.

2. *Allegory of the Vine* (vv. 10-14). Again, the vine is Judah. The rod, out of which a fire went to destroy the vine, is Zedekiah. It was his disobedience that caused the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

## VI. THE DOOM OF JERUSALEM (cc. 20—24)

### A. Jehovah's Justice (20:1-44)

This prophecy is dated "in the seventh year" of Jehoiachin's captivity (cf. 1:2); that is, 591 B.C. It was eleven months after the last date mentioned in 8:1.

Some "elders of Israel" came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord (cf. 14:1-11). In reply the prophet traced briefly the history of apostate Israel (vv. 5-32), with its chronic idolatry. Then he pronounced the righteous judgment of God in bringing about the Captivity (vv. 33-44).

### B. The Sword of the Lord (20:45—21:32)

In the Hebrew chapter 21 includes the last paragraph of chapter 20 in the English Bible. Obviously this is the correct division.

1. *Fire and Sword* (20:45—21:7). The prophet was asked to "drop" a parable against "the forest of the south

field" (Judah), announcing its destruction by fire. Then comes this interesting prayer: "Ah Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak in parables? (20:49) The same complaint is often made by modern readers of Ezekiel!

Again, the prophet was commanded to sigh bitterly (v. 6). When asked why, he was to explain that it was because of the coming destruction.

2. *The Song of the Sword* (21:8-17). A striking description (vv. 9-10, R.S.V.) is given of the Babylonian invasion:

*A sword, a sword is sharpened*
*and also polished,*
*sharpened for slaughter,*
*polished to flash like lightning!*

3. *The Route of the Sword* (21:18-27). The prophet was commanded to put up a signpost and mark two ways leading from it, one to Ammon and the other to Judah. This was to symbolize the fact that Nebuchadnezzar was debating whether to attack first Ammon or Judah, both of which had revolted against him. After consulting three forms of divination (v. 21), he was led to move against Jerusalem first. The resulting ruin would last until Messiah came (v. 27; cf. Genesis 49:10).

4. *The Sword of Ammon* (21:28-32). After Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem, the Ammonites plundered Judah (II Kings 24:2). But their sword must be returned to its sheath and they would be punished for their cruelty (vv. 30-32).

C. Three Oracles Against Jerusalem (c. 22)

1. *The Sins of the City* (vv. 1-16). Jerusalem is called "the bloody city" (v. 2). She is charged with murder and idolatry (vv. 3-6), disobedience to parents and oppression of the poor (v. 7), desecrating the Temple and the Sabbath (v. 8), immorality (vv. 9-11), brib-

ery and extortion (v. 12). The catalogue is long and sordid.

2. *The Furnace of Fury* (vv. 17-22). The house of Israel was dross, which must be melted in the furnace. In the fires of the Babylonian captivity it was purified of its idolatry.

3. *The Classes Condemned* (vv. 23-31). Prophets (v. 25), priests (v. 26), princes (v. 27), and people (v. 29) had all sinned grievously against God and their fellow men. Tragically, there was no intercessor: "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (v. 30).

### D. Aholah and Aholibah (c. 23)

Ezekiel again casts his prophecy in the form of an allegory, that of two sisters, Aholah and Aholibah. The former represents Samaria, and the latter Jerusalem. As in chapter 16, he says that Judah has been more guilty than Israel, for she paid no heed to the warning given by the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. Rather, she played the harlot with Assyria (v. 12) and Babylonia (v. 14). The language here is typically Oriental, but the tragic lesson should not be missed.

### E. Symbols of the Siege (c. 24)

This prophecy is dated "in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month." This was January, 588 B.C. The prophet was told this was the very day on which Nebuchadnezzar began the siege of Jerusalem.

1. *The Rusty Cauldron* (vv. 3-14). Perhaps the prophet was cutting up a lamb and putting it in a pot to boil when the Lord gave him this parable. The pot was Jerusalem. The choice pieces (v. 4) represented the leading men of the city. The fire was the siege. The rust,

or "scum," is the blood shed in the city. The emptying of the pot signified the Captivity, and its melting on the fire the destruction of Jerusalem.

2. *The Death of Ezekiel's Wife* (vv. 15-24). The prophet paid a heavy price for his ministry. He was told that his wife would die, but that he was not to mourn publicly in accord with the customs of that day (v. 17). This was to be a symbol of the tragic sorrow of the siege. Ezekiel was a sign to Judah (v. 24).

3. *The Restored Speech* (vv. 25-27). These verses seem to throw us back to 3:25-27, where Ezekiel was told that he would be restrained from appearing in public and unable to speak until God loosed his tongue. It does not seem probable that he had remained dumb until this time, or even that his ministry had been only a private one. At any rate, he is now informed that when the messenger arrives with the news of the fall of Jerusalem, the prophet will be able to speak again.

## VII. THE PROPHET OF RESTORATION (cc. 25—48)

The last half of the Book of Ezekiel consists of two parts: prophecies against foreign nations (cc. 25—32) and prophecies after the fall of Jerusalem (cc. 33—48). The latter have to do with the restoration from captivity (cc. 33—39), and the glory of the future kingdom (cc. 40—48).

### A. Prophecies Against Foreign Nations (cc. 25—32)

It is a striking phenomenon that all three of the prophets devote a long section to oracles against foreign nations. This was a part of their commission (cf. Jeremiah 1:5—"I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations"). Seven nations are addressed here, Egypt being given

the longest treatment (cc. 29—32) and Tyre next (cc. 26—28). The surprising feature is the omission of Babylon, which receives the most attention of any nation in Isaiah (cc. 13—14) and Jeremiah (cc. 50—51).

### 1. Surrounding Nations (c. 25)

The four nations treated here—Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia—had harassed the Israelite borders for many centuries. Now that both Israel and Judah had gone into captivity they vented their jealous joy in spiteful acts.

*a. Ammon* (vv. 1-7). The Ammonites were descended from a son of Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:38). But they had treated their brothers with insatiable cruelty. Now they rejoiced at the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple (v. 3). The prophet warns them that they too will be invaded from the east (v. 4). Their great glee at Judah's fall is described vividly in verse 6.

*b. Moab* (vv. 8-11). This country was likewise descended from Lot (Genesis 19:37). Because of her rejoicing over the fate of Judah she would also be overrun by tribes from the desert.

*c. Edom* (vv. 12-14). The Edomites were descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob. But the early feud between these two brothers had continued across the centuries. The Edomites took advantage of the fall of Jerusalem to wreak spiteful vengeance on Judah (cf. Obadiah). But they were not to go unpunished.

*d. Philistia* (vv. 15-17). The Philistines were not related to the Israelites, but came from Crete in the twelfth century B.C. From the days of the judges they had been a thorn in Israel's side. They too had taken vengeance when Judah fell (v. 15). God says that He will cut off the "Cherethites" (R.V.); that is, Cretans.

### 2. Tyre (cc. 26—28)

*a. Downfall of Tyre* (c. 26). This prophecy is dated "in the eleventh year"; that is, 586 B.C., when Jerusalem was destroyed. The people of Tyre had rejoiced at this event, feeling that Judah's loss would be their gain (v. 2).

Because of its almost impregnable position on an island, Tyre was proud and haughty. It is said that Nebuchadnezzar besieged it for twelve years (585-573 B.C.) before it submitted to his suzerainty. It gave Alexander the Great more difficulty than any other city. He finally solved the problem by building a causeway about half a mile wide from the mainland to the island. One can now drive out on that and view the ancient ruins. The prophecy that it would become "a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea" (v. 5) has been literally fulfilled.

Phoenicia, of which Tyre was the leading city, was the outstanding nation for seagoing commerce in ancient time (cf. v. 17). It had planted colonies across north Africa clear to the Atlantic Ocean. But it sank into oblivion, as God predicted through His prophet. Today the seaport and capital of Lebanon (ancient Phoenicia) is at Beirut, north of Tyre and Sidon.

*b. Dirge over Tyre* (c. 27). Ezekiel is commanded to take up a lamentation for Tyre. The tremendous outreach of its seafaring commerce is described vividly in verses 3-25. The cities and nations listed here took in most of the known world of that day.

But its doom is also described (vv. 26-36). The fall of Tyre would cause bitter wailing and consternation around the Mediterranean world.

*c. Doom of the King of Tyre* (28:1-19). This section consists of two poems directed against the ruler of Tyre. The first (vv. 1-10) is addressed to the prince of Tyre; the second (vv. 11-19), to the king of Tyre—probably the same individual.

The pride of the city was personified in its prince. This haughty one claimed deity (v. 2) and omniscience (v. 3). The Daniel referred to here is an ancient embodiment of wisdom (cf. 14:14, 20), not the Daniel of the captivity period.

It has commonly been felt that the language of verses 12-15 reaches beyond the king of Tyre. Many take it as referring to Lucifer before he fell and became Satan. With all due allowance for the typical extravagance of Oriental language—reflected, for instance, on the tablets of the kings of Assyria and Babylonia—the terminology here is truly remarkable. Note the statements: "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God . . . Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth . . . thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire." Verse 15 is especially significant: "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee." The prince of Tyre was a symbol of Satan.

*d. Destruction of Sidon* (vv. 20-24). This city, between ancient Tyre and modern Beirut, was once the mother city of Phoenicia. But Tyre soon outstripped it in greatness. Perhaps the remnant of Judah feared that Sidon would succeed Tyre as a threat to its peace. But the promise was given that it should no more be "a pricking brier unto the house of Israel" (v. 24).

The chapter closes with a promise of the restoration of Israel (vv. 25-26). The other nations will be destroyed, but Israel will finally be regathered to its own land.

### 3. Egypt (cc. 29—32)

Except for one paragraph (29:17-21), which is dated 571 B.C., all the prophecies against Egypt were uttered just before or after the fall of Jerusalem; that is, 587-

585 B.C. Egypt had been guilty of introducing idolatry among God's people (16:26) and had encouraged Judah to revolt against Assyria and Babylonia.

*a. The Fall of Egypt* (29:1-16). In "the tenth year, in the tenth month" (January, 587 B.C.) Ezekiel was told to utter this prophecy against Pharaoh-hophra, "the dragon." This proud king boasted that he was the creator of the Nile (v. 3). But God said He would put hooks into his jaws and throw him out into the desert (vv. 4-5). Egypt had been only "a staff of reed" to Israel, which broke easily (cf. Isaiah 36:6).

After forty years Egypt would be restored (v. 13). But it would be "the basest of the kingdoms" (v. 15), no longer a menace to Israel.

*b. Nebuchadnezzar's Wages* (29:17-21). This is the latest dated prophecy in the book, coming from April, 571 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had just subdued Tyre after a twelve-year siege (585-573 B.C.). But the people of that city had plenty of time to ship away their valuable merchandise, so that the Babylonians got very little booty for all their arduous labors ("great service") against Tyre (v. 18). So God promised to give wealthy Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as his wages. That monarch marched south in 568 B.C. and collected his reward. The point of view is that God had used Nebuchadnezzar as His instrument for punishing the nations and so he should be paid for his services.

*c. Egypt's Day of Judgment* (c. 30). The "day of the Lord" (v. 3)—that is, the day of judgment—would come to Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar would be the messenger to visit Egypt with destruction (v. 10). The idols of Egypt would be destroyed (v. 13).

Verses 20-26 are dated in 587 B.C. (v. 20), shortly before the fall of Jerusalem. Some may still have wondered which would finally win, Babylon or Egypt. Ezekiel

stated categorically that Jehovah was on the side of Nebuchadnezzar, who would, in turn, conquer Egypt. Only by divine inspiration could the prophet have foreknown the final outcome of the struggle for power.

*d. The Fall of Pharaoh* (c. 31). The word "Assyrian" in verse 3 is obviously a mistake, due probably to a confusion of *t'asshur* (cedar) with *'asshur* (Assyria). The last sentence of the chapter states clearly: "This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord God." Thus the chapter begins (v. 2) and ends with Pharaoh. He is pictured as a lofty cedar, proud and haughty (vv. 3-10). But for his pride he will be cut off (vv. 11-18).

*e. The Final Overthrow of Egypt* (c. 32). This chapter is clearly divided into two dirges, one for Pharaoh (vv. 1-16) and the other for Egypt (vv. 17-32). The first is dated on the first day of the twelfth month in the twelfth year (February, 585 B.C.), eight months after the fall of Jerusalem. The second is dated two weeks later, on the fifteenth day. In the first dirge Pharaoh is likened to a dragon in the seas (v. 2) whom God would cast out upon the land. Nebuchadnezzar would bring an end to Pharaoh's proud reign (v. 11).

The second describes in stirring language the descent of Egypt to Sheol, where the other fallen nations are already gathered (vv. 24-30). There it will lie with the rest of the "uncircumcised" (v. 32).

### B. The Return from Captivity (cc. 33—39)

Ezekiel's prophecies concerning Judah uttered before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (cc. 4—24) are marked mostly by denunciation of the people for their sins and warnings of judgment. The same tone characterizes the oracles against foreign nations (cc. 25—32). But in the last major section of the book (cc. 33—48) he looks beyond the Captivity to the restoration and future glory of Israel.

### 1. Personal Responsibility (c. 33)

*a. Of the Prophet* (vv. 1-9). This section is very closely similar to the prophet's original commission (3:17-21). In both places the responsibility of a watchman is emphasized.

*b. Of the People* (vv. 10-20). Each individual determines his own destiny. It is the truth already expressed at greater length in chapter 18. As recorded there, the people were saying, "The way of the Lord is not equal" (v. 20).

*c. Of the Survivors* (vv. 21-29). The "twelfth year" (v. 21) seems to be the Babylonian equivalent of "eleventh year" in Jeremiah 39:2. If so, the news of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. reached Ezekiel about six months after the event. It was then that he was "no more dumb" (v. 22). Evidently immediately preceding this time he had written some of his prophecies against foreign nations, but was not able to prophesy to the Jews.

This message was to the survivors in Judah: "they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel" (v. 24). It was a warning of doom for their idolatry (v. 25) and adultery (v. 26).

*d. Of the Captives* (vv. 30-33). Ezekiel was informed by the Lord that the Jews in Babylonia who came to him were not heeding his messages. "Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (v. 32).

### 2. Shepherds and Sheep (c. 34)

*a. Selfish Shepherds* (vv. 1-10). The rulers of the nation are likened to shepherds who feed themselves instead of the sheep (v. 2). They fleece the flock instead of feeding it (v. 3). But God will require the sheep at their hand (v. 10).

b. *The Good Shepherd* (vv. 11-16). The Good Shepherd will seek out His sheep, bringing them back to their own fold and feeding them there. The language here reminds one of Psalms 23 and John 10.

c. *Sheep vs. Goats* (vv. 17-31). The Good Shepherd will also act as Judge, separating the sheep from the goats. The promise of verse 23 is Messianic. Christ, the Son of David, will be the Shepherd.

### 3. Judgment of Edom (c. 35)

Edom is to be punished because of her "perpetual hatred" for Israel (v. 5). She will become "perpetual desolations" (v. 9).

### 4. Restoration and Regeneration (c. 36)

It is promised that God will gather the Israelites from all countries and bring them back to their own land (v. 24). This is followed by one of the outstanding passages on regeneration in the Old Testament: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (vv. 25-27).

### 5. Revival and Reunion (c. 37)

a. *The Valley of Dry Bones* (vv. 1-14). Ezekiel saw a valley full of dry bones. He was asked, "Can these bones live?" In other words, could the dead nation of Judah come to life again? When he prophesied, scattered bones became skeletons, skeletons became corpses, and finally corpses stood on their feet alive. Through this vision God promised the revival of Israel (vv. 11-14).

*b. Two Sticks* (vv. 15-28). The prophet was to take two sticks, write on one, "Judah," and on the other, "Ephraim." Then he was to join them and they would become one in his hand (v. 17). This was to symbolize the reunion of the twelve tribes.

### 6. Gog and Magog (cc. 38—39)

Gog, the prince of the land of Magog, will come against God's people (38:14-16). But the Lord will fight against him. It will take Israel seven months to bury the slain (39:12).

Magog has often been identified, rightly or wrongly, with Russia. Certainly the events of the last few years add poignancy to this interpretation.

## C. The Future Glory of Israel (cc. 40—48)

### 1. The New Temple (cc. 40—43)

In the twenty-fifth year of the Captivity (40:1)—that is, 573 B.C.—Ezekiel received a vision of the future temple. The measurements and furnishings are given in elaborate detail. Some hold that this is the description of a literal temple that will be built before or when Christ returns. It seems better to take it as symbolizing the new spiritual Kingdom. The important thing is that the glory of the Lord filled the house of God (43:2-5).

### 2. Regulations for the Temple (cc. 44—46)

Detailed instructions are given for the prince (44:1-3), the priests (44:9-31), the portions for priests (45:1-6) and the prince (45:7-25), the worship of the prince and the people (c. 46). The regulations are as specific as those found in Leviticus.

### 3. The River of Life (47:1-12)

This description is strikingly parallel to Revelation 22:1-2. The prophet sees a river of life flowing out of the sanctuary to bring blessing near and far.

4. The Holy Land (47:13—48:35)

The prophet is told the boundaries of the land (47:13-23) and the allotments to the tribes, priests, and prince (48:1-29). The book closes with the description of the Holy City (48:30-35).

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Where and when did Ezekiel prophesy?
2. Compare the calls of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
3. What was the main characteristic of Ezekiel's ministry?
4. What was going on in Jerusalem during 597-586 B.C., as revealed by the Lord to Ezekiel?
5. How does the second half of Ezekiel differ from the first?
6. How is the future glory of Israel described?

CHAPTER SIX

# THE APOCALYPTIC PROPHET
## Daniel

*Name:* "God has judged"
*Date of recorded events:* about 606-536 B.C.
*Place of ministry:* Babylon
*Contents of book:* History of Daniel (cc. 1—6)
Visions of Daniel (cc. 7—12)
*Verses to memorize:* 1:8; 12:3, 10

## INTRODUCTION

The Book of Daniel has been the subject of more controversy than almost any other book of the Bible. By most liberal scholars it is dated in the second century before Christ, around 165 B.C. This is because it describes in considerable detail the changing scenes of that period. Conservatives have held to the traditional Jewish and Christian view that the book was written by the Daniel of the sixth century B.C., who under divine inspiration was enabled to foresee the future for several centuries. One has to believe in the supernatural in order to accept the Danielic authorship of this book.

The reasons for holding to Daniel as author have been set forth ably by Edward Young, who is widely recognized as the leading conservative Old Testament scholar of this generation. In *An Introduction to the Old Testament*[1] and *The Prophecy of Daniel*[2] Professor Young has sought to give an adequate answer to the arguments of the critics against the Danielic authorship.

## I. HISTORY OF DANIEL (cc. 1—6)

### A. DANIEL'S CAPTIVITY (c. 1)

The beginning of Daniel's captivity is dated "in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah" (v. 1).

This would be 606 or 605 B.C. It is stated that at that time Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem. Having captured the city—he did not destroy it until twenty years later—he took "part of the vessels of the house of God" (v. 2) and carried them into the land of Shinar (Babylonia), where he put them in the house of his heathen god.

Nebuchadnezzar also ordered that some of the young men of the royal family should be taken to Babylon, where they could be instructed in the wisdom of the imperial palace. Among those were Daniel and his three friends. So Daniel was a prince of Judah. The four young men were given Babylonian names (v. 7). Strangely, while Daniel is best known by his Hebrew name, the other three are commonly referred to by their Babylonian names—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (cf. 3:12-30).

One of the outstanding spiritual lessons of the book is found in the eighth verse of the first chapter: "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." It was a great decision for a young man to make—a captive in a strange land, far away from the godly influence of family or friends. It was a courageous decision to make, one that might easily have cost him his life. Surrounded by heathen morals and religion, this brave youth stands as an inspiring example to the young people of all generations. Daniel stood by his God-given convictions, and that has always been the price of divine blessing.

Because Daniel stood true he found that God was on his side and brought him into favor with the prince of the eunuchs (v. 9). The one who was in immediate charge of the four Hebrews finally agreed to a ten-day test diet of vegetables and water. At the end of this period the four youths looked better than those fed on

the king's prescribed food (v. 15). So they were allowed to continue with the simple diet they had chosen.

This passage should not be used as an argument for vegetarianism. It must be remembered that "meat" in the King James Version does not mean animal flesh. The "meat offering" of the second chapter of Leviticus was the only one of the five offerings that did not have any meat in it! The Revised Standard Version gives the correct meaning when it translates verse 16 as follows: "So the steward took away their rich food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables."

The four Hebrews not only prospered physically; "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom" (v. 17). Daniel was honored with a special gift: "understanding in all visions and dreams."

At the end of the three-year probationary period (cf. v. 5), the prince of the eunuchs brought all the Hebrew princes before the king. Nebuchadnezzar found Daniel and his three friends to be wiser than all the rest. So they were retained in the royal presence. The king even discovered that in wisdom and understanding they were "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm" (v. 20).

The last verse of this introductory chapter states that "Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus." But one vision is dated "in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia" (10:1). That would be about 536 B.C.

### B. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Image (c. 2)

Many interpretations have been given of this and the succeeding chapters of Daniel. In order not to confuse the common reader with a variety of views, it seemed best for the sake of simplicity to adopt the interpretation most widely held by premillennialists today.

1. *The King's Dilemma* (vv. 1-11). In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which troubled him. Unfortunately he could not remember its contents. Yet he demanded that his wise men tell him its meaning.

The Chaldeans (wise men) answered the king "in Syriac" (Aramaic). One of the striking features of Daniel is that a rather long section (2:4—7:28) is in Aramaic—a Semitic language related to, but different from, Hebrew. The Jews learned Aramaic in Babylonia and carried it back to Palestine, where it was the common language of Jesus' day. Today the official language of Israel is again Hebrew.

2. *Daniel's Deliverance* (vv. 12-24). Angered because the Chaldeans could not tell him his dream and give the interpretation of it, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that all the wise men should be slain. Before the sword took off his head Daniel talked his way out of immediate death. Asking for time (v. 16), he called his three friends to prayer.

That night in a vision the dream and its interpretation were revealed to Daniel. After voicing his thanksgiving to God (vv. 20-23), Daniel asked to be brought in before the king.

3. *The Revealer of Mysteries* (vv. 25-30). The king asked the young Hebrew if he could interpret the dream. Daniel disclaimed all supernatural wisdom (v. 30), but declared that "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets" (v. 28). This true God was showing Nebuchadnezzar what would take place in the future. The occasion of the dream was the king's concern as to what would happen to his empire (v. 29).

4. *The Dream* (vv. 31-35). Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of a great image, in the shape of a man. The

head was of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the stomach and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, the feet a mixture of iron and clay. A stone "cut out without hands" struck and destroyed the image. Then it became a great mountain, filling the whole earth.

5. *The Interpretation* (vv. 36-45). The image portrayed four empires: (1) the Babylonian—"Thou art this head of gold"; (2) The Medo-Persian; (3) the Greek —of Alexander the Great and his successors; (4) the Roman. The mixture of iron and clay (dictatorship and democracy) receives the greatest attention (vv. 41-43). But all these empires will be overthrown and superseded by the kingdom of God, "which shall never be destroyed."

6. *Daniel's Reward* (vv. 46-49). With ancient Oriental extravagance the king worshiped Daniel. Then he promoted him as "ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon" (v. 48). Daniel's friends were also given high positions.

### C. The Fiery Furnace (c. 3)

1. *The Image of Gold* (vv. 1-7). Swelling with pride, the king made a large golden image sixty feet high. Then he called in all the officials of his realm for a great service of dedication. A herald proclaimed the king's command that when the music sounded those present should bow and worship the image.

2. *The Great Refusal* (vv. 8-18). The three friends of Daniel, at risk of their lives (cf. v. 6), refused to worship the image. They declined a second chance. No finer faith and faithfulness could be described than that declared in verses 17 and 18: "Our God . . . is able to deliver us . . . and he will deliver. . . . But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast

set up." That kind of courage and faith is absolutely unconquerable.

3. *The Fiery Furnace* (vv. 19-23). The king was so furious that he ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual. The mightiest men of his army were ordered to bind the three rebels and throw them into the fire. Such was the heat that these military officers were burned to death (v. 22).

4. *The Great Deliverance* (vv. 24-30). Suddenly the king jumped to his feet and cried out in astonishment, as he saw four men walking freely in the fire. With mingled fear and respect he asked the Hebrews to come out of the furnace. When examined, they did not have even the smell of fire on them.

The lesson of this incident is too obvious to be missed. As God's faithful children we never find ourselves in the fiery furnace of affliction of any kind—physical, financial, social, or otherwise—without the assurance that the Son of God, Eternal Love, walks by our side. And all the fire can do is to burn the bonds that would limit us, and thus set us free for greater fellowship and service. The story has been an inspiration to uncounted generations of Christians.

D. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Tree (c. 4)

1. *The Dream* (vv. 4-18). The second vision or dream of Nebuchadnezzar concerned the more immediate future than the previous one. This time the king remembered his dream, but still the wise men could not interpret it. So he called on Daniel for the explanation.

The king had seen a great tree that reached the sky. But a watcher, a holy one, came from heaven to decree that the tree should be cut down. For seven years (v. 16) the one represented by the stump that was left would dwell with the beasts, "to the intent that the living may

know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men" (v. 17).

2. *The Interpretation* (vv. 19-27). The tree was Nebuchadnezzar, who was exalted with self-pride. But he would be humiliated in a state of insanity for seven years (v. 25), after which he would be restored (v. 26). Daniel then pleaded with the king to repent and thus avert the calamity.

3. *The Fulfillment* (vv. 28-37). A year later the king was boastfully proclaiming that he had built the magnificent city of Babylon—the splendors of which archaeology has revealed in measure—when the decrees of doom sounded. For seven years of insanity he lived the life of a beast of the field. When restored to his right mind he worshiped the true God.

### E. Belshazzar's Feast (c. 5)

1. *The Sacrilege* (vv. 1-4). At a great feast for a thousand of his lords Belshazzar ordered the vessels from the Temple at Jerusalem to be brought in. While the wild orgy of drunken revelry increased, the guests drank wine from the sacred vessels and praised the heathen gods.

2. *The Writing on the Wall* (vv. 5-16). Suddenly the king's knees began to shake with a horrible fear. On the opposite wall the fingers of a man's hand were writing words. In terror the king called for his wise men, but they had no explanation. Finally the queen mentioned Daniel. Hurriedly he was brought to the palace and offered a great reward if he could read and interpret the writing.

3. *The Interpretation* (vv. 17-31). Daniel preached to the king about his sins. Then he declared that the kingdom was to be overthrown and given to the Medes and Persians (v. 28). Belshazzar honored Daniel with

fitting reward. But that night Babylon was taken and the king slain.

A generation ago the trustworthiness of the Book of Daniel was called in question because it seemed to say that Belshazzar was the last king of the Babylonian Empire. The secular records listed Nabonidus as the last king and did not even mention Belshazzar.

But finally the truth came out. Tablets of Nabonidus were discovered, on which he told of his love for travel and antique-hunting. He says that he left his son Belshazzar in charge of Babylon, as ruler. Thus at one stroke there was given confirmation of the reliability of the account here and also an explanation as to why Belshazzar made Daniel "the third ruler in the kingdom" (v. 29). Belshazzar was himself the second ruler!

### F. Daniel in the Lions' Den (c. 6)

1. *The Decree of Darius* (vv. 1-9). The king had appointed Daniel as the chief of three presidents over his realm and was contemplating making him a sort of prime minister (v. 3). This aroused the jealousy of the other officials. Daniel was so faithful that they could find no fault with his conduct. The only thing they could attack was his religion. So they tricked the king into decreeing that no one could pray to any god or man for thirty days except the king.

2. *The Faithfulness of Daniel* (vv. 10-15). When Daniel learned of the decree he continued his audible praying three times a day, with his window open toward Jerusalem. He feared God, and so he was not afraid of the king, enemies, or lions.

3. *The Deliverance of Daniel* (vv. 16-28). God shut the lions' mouths, and Daniel's persecutors were finally fed to them. The king made a new decree ordering the worship of Jehovah. Meanwhile Daniel continued to prosper.

## II. VISIONS OF DANIEL (cc. 7—12)

### A. The Four Beasts (c. 7)

This vision is dated "in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon." As noted above, Belshazzar reigned as coregent with his father in the last years of the Babylonian Empire, which came to an end in 538 B.C. This vision is closely parallel to Nebuchadnezzar's image dream (c. 2).

1. *The Vision* (vv. 1-14). Daniel saw four great beasts come up out of the sea. The first was "like a lion" (4), with eagle's wings. This represented the Babylonian Empire established by Nebuchadnezzar.

The second beast was "like a bear" (v. 5). It represented the Medo-Persian Empire.

The third beast was "like a leopard" (v. 6) and symbolized the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great. The four wings and four heads signified the four divisions that resulted after Alexander's death.

The fourth beast was "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly" (v. 7), with great iron teeth that devoured. This indescribable beast represented the Roman Empire.

Daniel was perplexed by the fact that a little horn came up among the beast's ten horns and plucked out three of the horns. But then he saw "the Ancient of days" sitting on the throne (v. 9) and holding judgment (v. 10). The terrible beast was slain (v. 11). The vision closed with "one like the Son of man" receiving from the "Ancient of days" an everlasting, universal Kingdom (vv. 13-14).

2. *The Interpretation* (vv. 15-28). The four beasts were four kings (v. 17). "But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (v. 18).

Daniel was particularly interested in the fourth beast and its horns. He was told that the ten horns represented ten kings. The little horn that rose among them would defy God and "wear out the saints" for three and a half years (v. 25). But the kingdom would be taken from him and given to "the saints of the most High" (vv. 26-27).

The little horn of Daniel 7:8 is usually interpreted by premillennialists as referring to the Antichrist at the end of this age. He will persecute God's people but will be overthrown.

### B. The Ram and the He-goat (c. 8)

The second vision of Daniel is dated "in the third year of Belshazzar." It took place at "Shushan the palace"; that is, at Susa, the ancient capital of Persia. It was "in the province of Elam," east of the Tigris-Euphrates valley.

1. *The Vision* (vv. 1-14). Daniel first saw a ram with two horns (v. 3). This represented the Medo-Persian Empire. The higher horn, which came up last, symbolized the second, stronger element, Persia. The Persian Empire extended itself westward to western Asia, northward to Greece, and southward to Egypt (v. 4). It did not go far eastward.

Then Daniel saw a he-goat coming from the west. It moved so fast that it "touched not the ground" (v. 5). This vividly describes the amazingly rapid conquests of Alexander the Great, who swept over Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and even to India—all in a few short years.

The he-goat, then, represented the Greek Empire. The "notable horn" (v. 5) was Alexander the Great, who broke the power ("horns") of the Medo-Persian Empire. But when "the he goat waxed very great" (v. 8) the horn was broken; that is, Alexander the Great suddenly

died (in 323 B.C., at the age of thirty-two). Four horns—four divisions of the empire—succeeded him.

Out of one of them came "a little horn." The little horn of Daniel 8:9 is taken as referring to Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler, who "waxed exceeding great, toward the south [Egypt] and toward the east [Mesopotamia], and toward the pleasant land [Palestine]." "By him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down" (v. 11); that is, Antiochus Epiphanes ("the shining one") stopped the daily sacrifices in the Temple at Jerusalem and desecrated the holy place by offering a sow on the altar. This took place in 168 B.C.

But later the sanctuary would be cleansed (v. 14). This was done in December of 165 B.C. and was commemorated in Jesus' day by the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22). It is still celebrated by the Jews as Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, one of the brightest seasons of the Jewish year.

2. *The Interpretation* (vv. 15-27). The ram is definitely identified as Medo-Persia (v. 20). The he-goat is Greece (v. 21). The great horn is the first king, Alexander the Great, who was succeeded by four rulers, none of whom had "his power" (v. 22). The "king of fierce countenance" (v. 23) is Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler of Syria. He would destroy "the mighty and the holy people" (v. 24); that is, the Jews.

### C. The Seventy Weeks (c. 9)

This vision took place "in the first year of Darius." Daniel read in the Book of Jeremiah that the Captivity would last seventy years.

1. *Daniel's Prayer of Confession* (vv. 3-19). When one is assured that God is going to send a revival, it is

not time to stop praying. Rather, that should be the occasion for earnest petition and confession, thus preparing the way for the revival.

This was the course that Daniel took. Though righteous himself he confessed the sins of the nation. Every intercessor must in a measure identify himself with those for whom he prays, confessing their sins almost as if they were his own.

2. *The Seventy Weeks* (vv. 20-27). Most scholars are agreed that "week" represents seven years. The 70 weeks would then be 490 years.

It is stated that "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" until the "Messiah be cut off" will be 69 weeks (vv. 25-26); that is, 483 years. If one identifies the former event with the decree of Artaxerxes for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in 445 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:4-8), the chronology is very close. Note that it is not the birth of the Messiah, but His death, that is mentioned. Subtracting 30—Jesus probably died in A.D. 30—from 483 gives 453, which is very near to 445.

But what about the seventieth week? Premillennialists usually place it at the end of this age, holding that the period of the gentile church—of unknown length—is inserted between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Israel's history. Obviously there are many difficulties connected with any and all interpretations of this chapter.

Verse 27 is sometimes taken as referring to a covenant made by the Antichrist with the Jews. "In the midst of the week" he breaks the covenant, and three and a half years of "The Great Tribulation" ensue. Another interpretation would relate the first half of the seventieth week to three and a half years of Jesus' ministry, followed by His death, which put an end to the need for animal sacrifices.

### D. Daniel's Last Vision (cc. 10—12)

This vision took place "in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia," after a three-week period of mourning and partial fasting. Daniel was by the river Hiddekel (v. 4); that is, the Tigris. He may have been burdened by the lack of enthusiastic response by the Jewish captives to the decree of Cyrus allowing them to return to their own land. He was doubtless concerned as to the final outcome of it all.

1. *The Messenger from Heaven* (c. 10). An angelic visitor appeared to Daniel and informed him that he had started to his aid the first day he prayed (v. 12). But he had been hindered by "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" until Michael came to help him (v. 13). The purpose of the vision was to cause Daniel to "understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days" (v. 14).

2. *The Persian and Greek Period* (11:1-35). The messenger declared that three kings would follow in Persia. These were Cambyses, Pseudo-Smerdis, and Darius Hystaspes. The fourth "far richer" king (v. 2) was Xerxes, who attempted the invasion of Greece but was defeated at Salamis in 480 B.C.

The "mighty king" who would "rule with great dominion" (v. 3) was Alexander the Great. At his death the kingdom was divided into four parts (v. 4).

There follows a summary (vv. 5-20) of the rival activities of "the king of the south"—the Ptolemies of Egypt—and "the king of the north"—the Seleucids of Syria. The fact that this material is given in great detail has led many scholars to claim that the Book of Daniel was written during this period.

The ruler who was of most significance to the Jews was Antiochus Epiphanes. So his doings are recorded at more length (vv. 21-35). He is called "a vile person" because of his utter contempt for sacred things. He would

"take away the daily sacrifice, and . . . place the abomination that maketh desolate" (v. 31). The latter phrase is found in the Olivet Discourse of Jesus (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14). The reference in Daniel is probably to the desecration of the Jerusalem Temple by Antiochus in 168 B.C., when he offered a sow on the altar. "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits," is an allusion to the revolt of the Maccabees.

3. *The Time of the End* (11:36—12:13). The scene seems to shift suddenly to the Antichrist at the end of this age, of whom Antiochus Epiphanes was a vivid type. At least it is usually held by premillennialists that the closing part of this chapter (11:36-45) is a description of the Antichrist arising out of the portrayal of Antiochus.

What is commonly called "The Great Tribulation" is described in the first verse of the twelfth chapter as "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." This strong statement was echoed by Jesus (Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19).

The messenger then revealed to Daniel that there would be a twofold resurrection—"some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." The third verse is a beautiful promise for the "wise" who "turn many to righteousness."

The book closes with an admonition to Daniel to seal its contents until "the time of the end" (v. 4, 9). Evidently its meaning would not be understood until later. He is told that many would be "purified, and made white, and tried," while the wicked would continue in their sin. That has been the history of humanity from Daniel's day to the present.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Where and when did Daniel prophesy?
2. What are the two main divisions of the book?

3. In what way is Daniel an example for young people today?
4. Compare the visions of chapter 2 and chapter 7.
5. Discuss the interpretation of the seventy weeks.
6. What does Daniel say about the time of the end?

## NOTES

### Chapters One and Two

### The Prince of Prophets

1. For the description of Uzziah's reign read the twenty-sixth chapter of II Chronicles.

2. See, for example, George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah* (Rev. ed.; New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., n.d.), I, 56.

3. See Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1949), I, 217.

4. George L. Robinson, *The Book of Isaiah* (Rev. ed.; Elgin, Ill., David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1948), p. 92.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

6. George Adam Smith, *op. cit.*, I, 330 f.

7. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

### Chapter Three

### The Weeping Prophet

1. *New Bible Commentary.* Ed. F. Davidson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 611.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 615.

### Chapter Four

### The Prophet of Doom

1. W. F. Albright, "The Old Testament and Archaeology," *Old Testament Commentary.* Ed. H. C. Alleman and E. E. Flack (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 147.

2. Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), p. 226.

3. *New Bible Commentary.*

## Chapter Five

### The Captive Prophet

1. Quoted in *New Bible Commentary*, p. 648.
2. *Ibid.*

## Chapter Six

### The Apocalyptic Prophet

1. Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 351-64.
2. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 19-26.

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